

# NARRATIVES OF TRAPPING LIFE



STORIES OF THE TRAIL AND TRAP-LINE

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# NARRATIVES OF TRAPPING LIFE

*Stories of the Trail and Trap-line in the  
Adirondacks, Maryland Marshes,  
Canadian Wilderness, Arizona and  
Florida; and of the Professional Trapper's  
Methods of Catching Fur-bearing  
Animals in These Localities*

Published by  
THE PELTRIES PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.  
370 Seventh Avenue, New York

SK 283  
.N3

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NOV 11 1922

MAY 1 1922

23-9441

# TRAPPING LIFE IN THE ADIRONDACKS

By Dick Wood

Photographs by the Author

## Part I

### Cabin Life

THE inky black darkness of a stormy night caught me at the head of the Cold river flow, six miles by trap line from my No. 1 camp, which I had left at daybreak. I had been told there was a drivers' camp at the lower end of this floe, and had started out in the morning with the intention of extending my trap line on to this camp. But on the way down, my attention was attracted to fresh bobcat tracks that crossed my trail and I took a fancy I might find him sleeping in a hollow snag or rabbit hunting in the balsam swamp around Mountain Pond. The only reward I got for my trouble was the animal lore I learned on the trail, and to partly make up the time, I had to steer myself by compass due southeast to hit the trail and thereby missed tending a mile of mink line.

Be it understood in the wilderness, such as this is, it is quite necessary to find camp before dark, when not prepared for spending a night on five feet of snow. It was more than a day's trip to the farthest-back lumber camp and humans, and three days' journey afoot to the village, approximately forty miles away. Headquarters camp was two days' 'shoeing back over my fast rotting trail.

The time was late winter; the place, the heart of the Adirondacks, as far back as it is possible to get in these woods. And late winter in a deep snow country is a caution to trappers, as this narrative will tend to insinuate.

While in the heavy timber trailing the cat, time flew fast and little did I notice the weather. But when I got out to the top of a ridge from which point I could look down upon my meandering valley trap line, the wind struck my face from

a different source than had prevailed in the forenoon, and felt warmer. I took a squint at the compass to see if I had got turned around in the matter of north and south, but this instrument verified the weather indications. Now a sudden change of the wind to the southwest would mean but one thing: impending storm, weather change and a further rotting of the trail.

Such a situation was not very encouraging to one out searching for camp, the location of which was only vaguely in mind. A Frenchman of the lumber camps had tried to tell me about this camp in his limited English vocabulary. This consisted mostly of motions toward the wilderness south, diagrams in the snow with No. 11 pacs, and shrugs, nods and lumberman's technicalities. Since my trap line extended to Cold River, I decided to disregard the Frenchman's overland directions and try finding the camp by continuing on down the river. Certainly the camp could not be more than three or four miles away from the end of the trail.

Even this presumed distance represented hard, gruelling labor in soft snow traveling. It meant two to five hours' steady going, owing to the trail and pack. It takes an old timer to appreciate trail conditions. Out on the farm trap lines a robust trapper could nearly cross a county in the same length of time required to traverse a half dozen soft-snow-trail miles.

I should have turned back toward Camp No. 1, but a dogged determination insisted I try the questionable ice of the river. By the time I stepped out of the energy sapping snow onto the ice of the river, the banks could hardly be discerned in the darkness and the wind was fast increasing in velocity. Big banks of dark clouds were gathering in the southwest, and altogether it was not a very inviting night to be out. Occasionally a snow-slide would start on the steep mountain side across the river and end in a dull roar, resounding from mountain to mountain.

After testing the ice with a belt axe, I started off down the river trustful, though the heavy pack was shifted to one shoulder. I had not gone far, however, until I realized the folly of continuing to carry the heavy traps, which I had brought to set in a woods' line back to No. 1 camp by way of Mountain



Headquarters Camp With Its Mountainous Surroundings

Pond. So I cached all but a few mink and weasel traps under a log on the highest point I could find and resumed the journey. I suppose that river made enough S's, double S's, W's, and XYZ's in those three crow miles to reach out across two or three sections. Yet I knew walking was next to impossible off the ice, besides I might chance losing the river course entirely. I did cut across two or three necks and saved a half mile each time.

Finally long hours after dark it got to the point where I ambled along without thought of anything but an endless trail, and without caution for the probable water holes. I had expected open water near the dam, deep water, and had little desire to walk into such a place in the dark with heavy winter clothes on.

When I did reach the dam and crossed over far above to escape the open water, I had a devil's own time finding the cabin in the dark. A high bank confronted me, so steep I couldn't possibly climb it with the snowshoes on, but when I went around the bank and circled back on top, the camp was found. Then did I appreciate the marshgrass-filled bunk, stove and my own tea pot and skillet in the pack, with fresh meat and bread makings. I just had one candle and with it lit started after tea water at the dam. As I slid down the high bank, the candle blew out and I went on without a light. The next morning I went down to look at the evidence of my rashness and there I crawled out on a shell of ice at least a foot higher than the four feet of rushing water going over the sluice.

I just got to camp in time for it soon began raining. Being in a shelter which seemed as comfortable as a hotel lobby chair contrasted with the wild night outside, I held no revenge against the weather idiosyncrasy. In the morning it still rained and I looked at the trail ahead of me with askance. Yet, I could not afford to get stranded there at any cost, not having more than a day's food supply, so I started in the rain to follow the faint suggestions of an old tote road overland back to Camp No. 1.

I shall not here narrate the fatiguing trail breaking back to camp, but finally made Camp One, and ate a lunch. After a smoke and rest I picked up myself and rifle, caching every-



thing else I had in the camp, and hit the best pace I could muster toward headquarters camp; six to eight miles east. Here things were fairly comfortable and I knew we were in for a regular period of cabin life. There comes such a time at least once each season, when the trails are rotting and building up again, weather cutting all kinds of diabolical capers and the fur bearers laying low.

"Well, if here ain't the Sun Worshipper back. Thought you'd be gone a week, but knew you'd change your mind at such an infernal change in the weather," greeted the "Professor," as I had dubbed my partner.

"Bet yer life I knew enough to get back while the getting was good. This is only a weather breeder, a warning. The Old Man has gone off on his annual vacation and you'll see how the boys run it for the next month. And, Chef, when did the Professor get in?" I asked of a long-legged camp fixture with decidedly culinary gifts.

"Just got changed from wet to dry clothes when you came in. Got wet in his tent up in the Sawtooths and spent a miserable night, from what I can gather."

"Ha! that don't sound much like the Professor to me. What does your Kephart say about tenting in these near-Alps in late winter, Professor?" But I got no answer, nor did I wait, but changed to dry clothes soon as possible.

"Now, fellows," says I, "we're in for a siege of it, take it from me. Trapping from now on in these mountains is going to be a thing of imagination, mostly, here in camp, and we'll have to bid our time to run just a few traps to keep properly exercised, and maybe the weather will be accommodating enough to remain in one mood long enough for us to pull our farthest traps. Of course, our only hope is it will come a freeze or snow and turn cold." Thus I tried to reconcile my partners, who were from the "outside," to the inevitable camp life.

Well, it did freeze and snow, rain and blow, sleet and hail, melt and build the trail during the next four weeks, a continual demonstration of weather conglomeration.

We settled down to cabin life with considerable regret, though it was the only practical thing to do. Trapping was

out of the question, and the camera, my invariable trail companion, was useless, and there was nothing else to do. We began by eating, drawing copiously from the meat cache back of the cabin. Whereas, of course, we ate a limited variety of food, roughly prepared, on the trapline and in the shanties, we now had nothing much else to do but catch up on our eating. Our larder boasted of most everything but a fresh cow, and the canned Borden's answered very well for a substitute.

And then did we, Professor and I, begin to appreciate the Chef's art in slinging the dough. Theretofore we had set him down as a peculiar product of inclination qualified only for a weasel line around camp. But when he showed decided good taste in his cooking concoctions, himself having a finicky appetite extremely repulsive to all common goods fit for mortals, we forgave him a lot. There was one thing sure, neither of us uncouth semi-barbarous trappers would attempt to tease his fickle appetite with anything short of angel food, the nearest delicatessen shop being a few hundred miles south. He could eat his own dishes with some degree of relish. Some of the dinners we had would have compared favorably with a Delmonico banquet and our voracious appetites did justice to them.

After eating we smoked, the Chef and I, the Professor being more virtuous in this respect (but equally less in many other ways) and then the cards were dealt. Pitch led in popularity, but draw and stud poker were very interesting as long as the "chicken feed" lasted. When the victor gathered in the spoils we had to devise other amusements.

Among the Professor's many sins, I hasten to mention, was a weakness for shaving. Even the Chef was immune from this exigency of civilization. Every day Professor ran a miniature lawnmower over his mug, claiming a great deal of satisfaction in so doing, but he refused to allow me to shave him with the Marble's Ideal for which purpose I had carefully whetted it several hours.

Before being exposed, I confess to a weakness for French literature—not the Parisian pot-boiler. Many times as I approached the climax of one of Balzac's delightful intrigues, the Professor snuffed the candle out with his six shooter in

a sort of genuine bravado fashion. One evening this got on my nerves—I was reading De Maupassant's "Moonlight on the Water," or something like that, and didn't like to be disturbed, so emptied the Colt's auto into the wall over Professor's head and that stopped the candle business. The Chef hastily opened the cabin door, whether to let himself or the smoke out, I don't know.

As the more or less monotonous days passed, we came to know each other too well, until it seemed each had all the faults peculiar to the human race. I accused Professor of being fit company for a dirty Beaver Indian, for which I knew he had a particular distaste, having spent some time in the Northwest, and he retorted such an aborigine would be preferable to my company. Upon hearing this sang-froid reply, I shut up like a clam.

While the wind intermittently howled outside, it either snowed or rained. The Weather Man did finally get down to a sort of system, after having experimented for a couple of weeks. It ran something like this: Rain night and day, hailing some; then sleet and freeze followed by a snow blizzard, ending in steady all night and day snow. All trails were now entirely obliterated and there was soft snow to wade through. Clear night; next day warm and sunshiny as June. We kid ourselves to thinking it might be practical to break trail to some traps, and laboriously do so. Put the traps up in excellent working order, having dug open snow-set traps out of two feet of the Beautiful White, and in the evening by the warmth of the box stove congratulate the newly broken trails. Wake up to find it raining and the snow fast going down. Three weeks of this so got on our nerves as to require a bottle a day of Dr. Jordan's Pain Killer—guaranteed not over 92 per cent. alcohol! (The Chef's raisin home-brew wasn't half so good).

Between spells I crossed the river in front of the camp, noting that an otter had during the night passed under the old dam. Then I set some weasel traps; also took a picture of the cabin so openly posed against the background of snow-covered mountains. The Chef gladly escaped the confines of the cabin to rustle some fresh game, bringing a couple of snowshoe rabbits for a change in the meat diet. Professor's snow-

shoes had worn out on his marten line in the crags of the Sawtooth ranges, and his Nibs was busily engaged in making a new pair out of barrel hoops and telephone wire. (They were a graceful 'shoe)!

The Chef made a ukelele out of a dishpan and fish line. He was clever with it. (Not).

After the weather completely baffled trapping plans, and we had exhausted all manner of cabin amusements, and the French translations were all read, the partners three even passed the stage of wishing each other in warm climes and refused utterly to be sociable, true sourdough trapper style. The food ran to low ebb, until one day the Chef cooked a syrup bucket full of doughnuts, the last of the makings. At night the doughnuts were gone, for verily the Chef knoweth how to cook.

The larder now having diminished to the usual trapper's stock of fresh meat, tea, sourdough bread and more meat, I could see a faraway look in the partners' eyes, a look of green fields and sociable friends in the lowland country. I knew I should vamoose, not feeling any more amiable than a bear roused out of its winter sleep, and accordingly hit the Cold River trail, which I might have traveled for a week to its mouth in Raquette river, but I stopped at the Dam Camp, determined to make the best of the remaining days of the season. I had a mink in a trap near the cabin.

Thus ended the month of cabin life. Two days later I came back to the toboggan trail and observed my tracks obliterated, though for once there hadn't been any change in the weather. The partners had unreservedly vacated. Well, who can blame 'em? That period of weather was a corker.

## Part II

### The Cold River Trail

This Cold river basin was new to me, but I had studied the topographic maps until I had more of it in mind than one pair of legs would cover. Maps and a knowledge of traveling by direction is a great aid to a trapper in a new territory. Headquarters camp was located near the head-waters of the river

and my trap lines started from camp in a general western course down Cold river toward the Raquette. But to the mouth was a far greater distance than could be covered by any one trapper successfully from our central camp. I figured it would be a fair week's trip to run a line through to Long Lake, but it was too late in the season to establish such long lines, and I was told that Long Lake trappers got up the river quite aways.

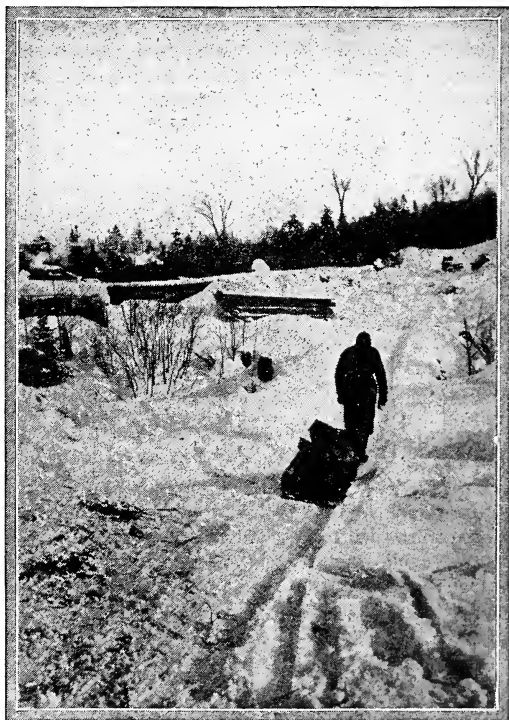
This Cold river country was cracked up to me by a breed guide who had been in there twenty years previously. We were fishing for trout—Bill Randall and I—in the Boreas river, and the guide's description was that of a trapper's paradise—a veritable wilderness in the backyard of a civilized country. Even Bill showed considerable interest in the glowing descriptions, and regretted being tied down to a mere forty-mile square west of Lake Champlain.

While the guide was well meaning in his accounts of this new country, he had not taken into consideration the change that might ensue in a period of twenty years. Anyway, incentive enough had been thrown my way to start me in the next fall on a trip of exploration. I knew it was necessary to prospect for furs, a way in, and a camp site. The breed's experience had been before his days of guiding, while yet a log driver, and he told of catching several dozen foxes one winter in one or two traps set out back of the camp. I expected to find old cut-over country, hard to travel through, and perhaps with no way in after the water freeze-up. And although this Cold river country was less than a hundred miles away, I could find no one among the many trappers, guides, hunters and natives of the Boreas river country who had been to Cold river since the lumbering days of twenty years past. Apparently the country had gone back to its original wild state, so they insinuated and I was inclined to assume, and was a vast region of no trappers and many fur bearers. A land of more or less mystery, far back from human habitation, seemed an ideal place to me.

This is related as no reflection on those that gave me the Cold river fever, but it will show the many young fellows that write me about trapping grounds in the Adirondacks and

elsewhere that there is nothing so valuable as first-hand experience.

Knowing that much of the country had been cut over, Pard and I started in on the north side twenty miles or thereabouts above the head of the river, with the idea of getting into vir-



**Pulling into the Lumber Camp**

gin timber. We knew it was likely little lumbering had been done where the logs could not be driven out and that only in virgin timber were we apt to find marten in fair numbers.

I shall not detail the incidents of the trip in, but suffice it to say we found plenty of virgin timber above the headwaters. We also found a lumbering outfit right in on the grounds, forty miles back, where we expected nothing but the primeval forest. But when we figured this afforded a means of transportation into the country, it was a toss-up with us as to whether we were in or out of luck. As I see it now, the lumbering outfit was more of an asset than a detriment.

The Cold River Trail was a gift from the Lumber Company. It meandered in the general course of the river for many miles to the west. While the tote road bridges were down in many places, after an accumulation of five feet of snow, they were never noticed and the open space afforded an excellent toboggan trail. Then, too, knowing the general direction of this trail, what had really been the river drivers' road, there was little necessity of exploration to learn the country. The trail served the purpose of a drawn line through a wilderness, with obvious reason to "follow this" and lose no time in getting out traps. It was an easy matter to set off the trail a mile or so, and nothing to remember I was either north or south, and if necessary, I could compass back.

In a way, the river could be followed, but not there, for it was too swift to freeze over or run a canoe in. To follow the meandering banks is not a practical undertaking. I did follow the trail to where the river was calm enough to freeze, then took to ice. In this manner I was able to get over considerable ground, which is a necessity of successful wilderness trapping.

My No. 1 camp was only one mile below our toboggan trail, and it being down hill much of the way, I had an easy time getting the camp stocked. First, right off the main trail a quarter of mile, nestled in the evergreens, lay a beautiful lake. By brushing out a trail to this body of water, I was able to toboggan down the lake shore more than half the distance to camp. The narrow toboggan just fitted in my snowshoe trail, and I hardly noticed the heavy sack of traps, sleeping bag, grub and

cooking outfit. Along the rocky shore I found several excellent mink sets, besides foxes had regularly traveled the lake ice. I stopped several times to make sets on the way down.

The only fox sets I made were strictly blind. If I found where a fox had regularly traveled between two large rocks, or trees, or in any other confined place, I approached on snowshoes at right angle to the trail, scooped out an excavation, put in a lining of balsam tips, and set the trap. I always use a large grapple for this set. Sometimes I cover the inside of the trap jaws with paper or birch bark, and invariably the sets were made in a storm so the trap and snowshoe tracks were soon obliterated. As it snowed nearly every day, these sets were very convenient. But the great hindrance was too much snow. Too often the trap was buried entirely before a fox came along. Again the rabbits would play havoc with the sets. I tried brushing over some sets, but only rarely would conditions permit such action to look perfectly natural to a fox's eye. The snow was most apt to settle just right over a trail set in the thick balsams, but here the rabbits were a nuisance.

It is a very difficult matter to successfully cover a trap with snow. Never handle it with bare hands, and even when brushed over, it has a tendency to settle down. Natural falling snow will not do this. When I had to thus artificially cover the traps, I also brushed out my tracks with an evergreen bough.

Mink sets came easier, as one can always find sheltered places. I never had any trouble catching mink in blind land or snow sets, but I must have a perfectly clean, odorless trap. It's not the steel that offends the olfactory nerves of the mink, but the odors that cling to steel. For land sets I always handle the traps with gloves on as a precaution, though it is not always necessary. I don't want the traps smoked, scented or doped in any way, just cleaned of rust and odors by boiling in clean water.

New traps should be boiled with bark or evergreen boughs to darken them, or they may be buried in muck. For bait sets the traps may be doped with some animal grease. The



mink trap land set should be carefully concealed. Spring holes are great mink set locations, and all that is necessary is to drop a trap into the right spot, provided it is dark like the color of the spring bed.

The trip from headquarters camp down to the lake was a half day's job, and by the time I had made two or three fox sets, and as many for mink, the short day was drawing to a close. I had gambled most on the outlet, and was not disappointed. Here I found an ideal mink run, a fox crossing-log and an old otter track. I also had the opportunity to knock over some supper meat with the .22 Marlin and slung it on the toboggan. Sets were made at the outlet, and more traps cached, then I resumed the trail. Half way down the long mountainside, the old road crossed a high bridge, and I could not refrain from stopping to put a No. 1 trap under it. I baited this set for weasel, but hoped to catch a mink. I never like to pass up a tote road bridge.

I reached camp at dark by coasting on the toboggan most of the way down, entering at express train speed. Over in one corner of the floor was a spread of balsam boughs used for a bed during the hunting season, perhaps, and there was a stack of wood behind the stove. These things were appreciated. But I didn't have any compliments for the fellow who had carried the stove-pipe away. I tried to manufacture one out of tar paper and liked to have burned the camp down. So I opened wide the door, and as the window was out in the opposite end of the camp, the smoke blew out. Also the zero weather froze the cooking about as fast as it thawed on the stove. I used the stove top for a table, making away with huge quantities of bacon, skillet bread, raisins and sugar with plenty of strong tea, and soon after crawled into the sleeping bag.

Here is where my "Comfort Sleeping Pocket" proved its worth. I had no time to repair a camp and build a bunk, but by blowing the air mattress up I could crawl into a bag as comfortable as home, and sleep as warm as toast in a place as open as a barn. I never enjoyed life more than those open air nights in a Comfort Sleeping Pocket. From under the pillow I extracted two trail friends, a candle and volume of

the classics too dry to read in civilization, and read myself to sleep. When in camp alone far from civilization I can read with relish such works as the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress and Dante's Inferno.

I had expected to have to repair the camp before I could endure it, but as time was valuable and I discovered the sleeping pocket obviated the necessity, not to mention the lack of a stove pipe which called for open air use, I started out the next morning to extend the trap-line.

I cannot too highly recommend a reliable sleeping bag for the trapper's use. Not that he can't get along without me, for he can well do without a gun or shirt for that matter, but whether it hits with "sourdoughs" or not, the "Comfort Sleeping Pocket" certainly smooths the trail. Best of all, it is a time saver. By spending a half day to repair an over-night camp, I would have had a miserable sleep at best, without the bag. If some of the professional sourdoughs, who are terrorized by the thought of a winter night away from camp, would equip themselves with such a bag, they would stick closer to the trail. The other type of real sourdough who builds a fire and lies by it like an aborigine, thereby laying the foundation for an old age of rheumatism, could for one wolf bounty or the price of two good pairs of blankets secure a lifetime bed of comfort. There are some who prefer the old style blankets and balsam boughts, but nine to one they never thoroughly tried out a good sleeping bag.

At the risk of jeers from would-be sourdoughs, I'm going to further suggest the inconsequential weight of a flannelette covered hot water bottle. It works like a heater in a sleeping pocket. With these two items I will engage to camp anytime, anywhere night overtakes me. I am never worrying about getting too far from camp when on the trail of bear, otter, wolf or fisher, so often trailed by trapper-hunters.

From Camp One I expected to run a two days' circle line down the river to the big dam and back the next day across the mountains. The line followed the Cold river trail, with one big loop around Mountain pond and another around a mountain peak for marten.

I followed the suggestion of an old tote road until it lost itself in a beaver meadow. I filled my Duluth packsack with two blankets, one small skillet and quart tea pot, two days' drub and all the traps I could stagger under. Two miles down the trail I wanted an excuse to drop the pack, so took the gun and sneaked over a ridge bordering a balsam swamp to kill something for food and bait. I could travel in the snow noiselessly, and hunting was merely a means to an end. I was fortunate enough to find a beautiful little lake not on the map, and welcomed the discovery as if I could see mink and fox sets made. I cached some bait and my gun, which latter was entirely too heavy for hard traveling, and continued by direction toward Cold river. I expected to reach the river after a few hours, but was disappointed. While the river flowed in a general western direction, I did not take into account the extent to which it bore off south (I was on the north side) and it was three o'clock in the afternoon when I stepped onto the ice of Cold river.

On the way down I made several sets for mink and weasel, a few for fox and one for otter. Yet it seemed the trap load was no lighter. Looking across Cold river at this point, I beheld the majestice mountains that isolate this stream. It seemed their snow-covered bald peaks touched the sky, and many of them were crowned by the clouds. I gazed at the lofty peaks and crags with wonder, and an intense longing for the valuable fur bearers they no doubt harbored. And as snow slide after snow slide came roaring down the denuded sides, I well knew any marten were as secure in those heights as if in another world. I reckoned that if some Aladdin's lamp should will me all the furs denned under the scope of my eyes, there would be an awfully congested fur market and a block in Wall street might change hands. All these meditations I indulged to the extent of forgetting the ever-increasing weight of my pack and the shadow of night fast falling over the land. A pair of marten tracks headed toward the mountains brought me back to grim reality, and I hastily constructed a cubby pen, set and baited it, with an anxious eye on the setting sun.

I now cached the remaining traps and hit up double time to camp. It was job enough next day to break trail over the mountains back to Camp One, without a pack load. I found signs plentiful enough to warrant a trap line. Weasels were most numerous, but I saw only one fisher sign, where it had come down the ravine of a mountain, tramped around an old lumber camp and gone back. I immediately reckoned they were pretty well fed up on porkies, and it was prior to the traveling season. Where a stream crossed the old trail in a ravine, I saw the tracks of a bob-cat, though too old to be an inspiration. Mountain Pond promised a fair mink line, and I decided if I had time to spare, after these places were covered with traps, I would run a loop into the peaks after marten. I had plenty of traps at camp and wanted to get out as many as I could tend.

This way I got back to camp in time to run a weasel line around the old lumber buildings. These little fur bearers were not to be scorned at two and three dollars each, and it seemed I might reap a fair harvest of them. The traps were set to spring at a hair's weight, protected from weather and usually baited with part of a rabbit.

This night as I crawled into the Comfort Sleep Pocket, I anticipated an interesting day on the morrow. First, I would run the line to Cold river, set from there on to the dam, then work back over the mountain trail setting traps at the marked places. I had seen enough mink sign around the dam camp and on the river banks below camp to delight any trapper.

After a day's line set down the river below the dam camp, I would have a good three days' round, which meant the traps would get tended twice a week and I would have Sunday off to visit headquarters camp. And amid the Great Silence I dropped off into oblivion.

### Part III

#### The Otter's Trail

The traps were now all out, excepting a reserve supply for replacement cached at headquarters camp, and I began to harvest a small crop of fur bearers. Minks and weasels were

more or less a staple catch, though it didn't knock me off my feet to find a sly old dog fox hung up in a trap one morning within a-mile of camp. Rather, I expected to stretch his hide sooner or later; he had displayed altogether too much nerve for an old trap-shy fox. He chased rabbits in a swamp near camp and barked at the camp light and otherwise challenged me numerous times. A blind set made just before a snow storm "got his goat."

It had been a rush from daylight to dark getting the trap lines established, but now that there wasn't anything to do but keep them baited and properly set, I had more time. If the day remained freezing cold, I would make great headway on the trail, getting into camp in the middle of the afternoon, thus having plenty of time to set rabbit snares, stretch skins and cut stove wood. On days when the trail softened, as it often did, I was lucky to get in before dark.

I met the otter's trail where it crossed mine a quarter of a mile below camp one cold morning just after I had made the rounds of all the trap lines, and was starting over again down the Cold river trail. I think it had been forty below zero that night and the trees were now popping and twigs broke off like icicles when touched and the buck deer and rabbits had run all over the country to keep from freezing.

One of the best means of learning an animal's habits is to follow its trail in the snow, observing every action and reason for such action by the trail "signs." A trapper improves his skill in proportion to his intuition for observation. To the "born" trapper and nature student, an animal's trail is more interesting than one of Cooper's Leatherstocking stories. There is romance, adventure, humor, suspense, drama, character traits and all other "story qualities" in an animal's trail. It only requires keen observation to read these interesting facts from the trail as you would read a printed history of the Fall of Rome. Naturally, successful trapping goes hand in hand with the mind appreciative of wild life's doings. I have had partners who were experts at trapping, and invariably they observed the actions of wild life with more than a monetary interest. Such trappers always could command a

very remunerative wage in pursuits other than trapping, though perhaps not so enjoyable and free a life, but the love of the outdoor associations held them to their humble calling.

I hastened back to camp, exchanged the pistol for the rifle, put a blanket and two days' rations in the haversack and started.



**The Otter's Trail Overland**

I had had considerable experience in the "South Woods" hunting otter and fisher, and knew the former to be easy to hunt but hard to kill. They follow streams, fishing along and darting in and out of air holes, usually coming up with a trout which they devour near the hole. Shoot one and invariably he wiggles toward the hole and often slides in, leaving a bloody foam to enrage the unlucky trapper-hunter. Experienced shooters will always bide their time until an opportunity for a shot is afforded in which the animal cannot escape in its death struggles.

First I back-tracked the otter to get a line on its route. It had come down out of the high mountains toward Moose pond, twenty miles away. How it got over into that country I couldn't imagine, though I knew fifty miles meant nothing to a husky otter. I reckoned it had crossed the Sawtooths from the lakes around Ampersand, thus striking the headwaters of Cold river. Where Cold made a big bend down to Duck Hole, the otter had cut across from a mountain tributary stream and hit the river below the big dam.

Mr. Otter had slid down the river bank on the crusted snow and dived into the first air hole in sight. Rather he had either known this spot to be over swift water or had walked out on the ice and listened for rapids, then drilled down through the snow and disappeared. I now had to decide whether the animal had gone up or down the river, but correctly guessed the latter course. It was fully a half mile down the river to where the otter trail again made its appearance.

This time he had come up under a pile of drift debris lodged against a tree growing on the water's edge, and followed the river bank for several hundred yards. Again the trail ended at an open water hole.

I was going light on elongated snowshoes that carried me at a lively clip over the frozen snow. Some places I could have discarded the shoes, where the wind had swept the ice, but it was safer to keep them on as the weight was thus distributed over a larger area. Should I break through, the water would be shallow anyway, as only the swiftest rapids would remain open. I was making about six miles an hour, anyway.

The little mink had played out a lot the night before and it was a temptation to stop and set traps for them, that is, go back to caches after traps. But I only made a mental note of good locations for future occupation, and kept dogging the otter's trail. Surely, on as excellent a trout stream as Cold river, famed far and wide, I would find the otter sitting up on the bare ice somewhere with a flopping fish in its jaws, affording an easy target for the steel .303 bullets.

Only once did I find where the otter had eaten a fish, then the trail ended seemingly for good-bye. The trail had been made early that morning, I knew, hence my anticipation in following it up. I didn't believe the otter had more than three or four hours' start at the best, and if it should fish along I might catch up. I always kept my eyes glued to the river far ahead in hopes of seeing the coveted dark spot on the ice. Of course, I figured the otter might "lay up" over day, which would give me the chance to pass it. Every time I turned a bend in the river I did so cautiously, for most of the air holes were around bends and I didn't intend to alarm a thirty dollar otter before I had time to greet him with a bullet. Also I was careful about the wind, but fortunately the air was in my favor.

By noon I had made in turns and reaches of the river perhaps ten to fifteen miles. I stopped at a point where I could command a distant view of the river and ate a cold lunch, drank some river water and smoked a pipe. In so short a halt I nearly chilled and knew the thermometer back at camp must still be hovering around the zero mark. The sun appeared far off in the southwest and gave very little warmth. I thought of the days when I had basked in the broiling sun in Tennessee and on the hot sands of bathing resorts; then I jumped up and ran a mile to get warm.

Never again did I see the otter's trail that day. I reached my lower river camp, by trap line calculations two days' journey which I had made going light in one day, though it was after dark. The winter days were still short.

I tended the mouse line inside the cabin, started a fire in the snow and proceeded to thaw out some meat. Anybody but a



trapper would not believe the facts of that supper of steak, skillet biscuit, and rice-and-raisin dessert; three times the skillet was filled and emptied of the cooked contents, but it was a one-man skillet.

The next morning I was stirring around camp before daylight, having frozen out of the bunk, though I had wrapped in three blankets of all wool. After pancakes and brown sugar and coffee, I took time to look at all the mink traps around camp before resuming the otter trail. I had a particularly good set at the dam and went down to look at it.

Here where the water went over the sluice and was open for several feet above the dam, the otter had made its appearance again, climbing onto a crust of ice along the sluice wall. While the tracks were fresh looking, I could only conjecture as to whether they had been made the day or night before.

I now passed up most of the mink traps and hastened out on the trail, first frying a steak for lunch. A short way below the dam was an excellent fishing pool, judging from the amount of otter sign. Evidently the hunted otter had taken time for a square meal at this pool, and I reckoned we had eaten breakfast at about the same time. This encouraged me immensely. I figured the otter was a large male by tracks and other indications, and at top price, provided I got a shot in a favorable spot, his hide would be worth the equivalent of three dozen iron men. I ought to get it in three days, that would be —

What was that? Something moved on the river bank a hundred yards ahead. I hurriedly but cautiously, with thumb on the safety of my rifle, approached the spot where I had glimpsed a movement. There I discovered a fresh furrow in the inclined bank. Mr. Otter had been rolling and sporting around in the soft snow under the thick balsams, but had been wise enough to keep an air hole nearby. Certainly he would not come up at this hole again, so I ran down the river to get ahead and watch at an air hole. Of course, I knew enough to leave the ice and take through the woods, thereby cutting on bends and not telegraphing news ahead of my coming. Few trappers figure on the extent that ice will carry sound waves,

I believe. It would be difficult to surprise an otter eating or playing on the ice, if you approached on the bare ice wearing noisy snowshoes. Everyone knows such objects as water, ice, railroad rails, wires and even the ground are better conductors of sound than air. Except under favorable conditions, air is a mighty poor sound conductor.

I reached a beaver dam a half mile below where I had seen the otter, and here I decided was the spot to watch where the water broke over the brush. I waited there for almost two hours and was getting restless, thinking perhaps the otter had gone ahead of me. At an unprepared moment a head shot out of the water, two slim feet braced a body against the force of the swift water and two beady eyes focused on the hunter on the bank. I knew there was no time to spend sighting the gun on the object and fired, scoring a miss. The otter dived back into the water like a streak of lightning. I hastily ran out on the ice of the pond, hoping to see it swimming under the ice. What I did was to turn the otter back; it darted over the dam and disappeared like so much lead dropped overboard. Again the race resumed, except now the hunted was warned of the hunter.

All day I stuck to the trail, only seeing it above ice occasionally, and at night camped in the open, keeping a fire going all night and wrapped in one blanket with my back to a tree. A crude brush leanto was built against the tree and a lot of balsam boughs thrown in to lie on. A huge quantity of food keep my vitality up. I shot a rabbit and cooked it over the fire for breakfast.

By daylight I was mushing along the trail, as much to amuse myself as in the anticipation of connecting with the otter. Game once alarmed and put on its guard is doubly hard to capture.

By noon I had traversed several miles of river bank, taking to the ice occasionally. It had been over an hour since I had seen the otter tracks, and I began to doubt that the animal was still ahead. I must have passed it under the ice, and if so it had surely banked.

I decided the chase was hopeless, left the river and started overland for my No. 1 camp. About mid-afternoon I caught

a glimpse of something in the woods ahead and quickly decided it was a deer, as these animals were numerous. I was perhaps meditating where or how many miles down Cold river the otter might be by that time, and if it was still on the alert.

I was startled by stepping right into a fresh trail that seemed strangely out of place in the deep woods. The weather had moderated considerably, softening the snow, and the tracks were indistinct. But by the body size burrow in the snow where the sunlight had struck it, I guessed it to be an otter trail. I thought of the object I had glimpsed and put it down as responsible for the trail.

If ever I stepped out in double-quick, I did then. I followed that trail up hill and down for a half mile before I again saw its maker. Going forward with surprising speed was a mature otter of a beautiful dark color contrasting with the white snow. I increased my pace and likewise did Mr. Otter. The near-naturalists that tell you an otter can't get around fast when out of the water for reason of his short legs is handing you something. He never tried to catch one in crossing a mountain range.

When the otter hit a patch of soft up-hill snow, I gained, but how it did fly down hill on crusty snow, gliding like an expert on skis, occasionally kicking with its hind feet like a swimmer, and coasting great distances on the front feet doubled under its belly.

I knew this otter was making for a lake about a mile distant and I strained my muscles to see that it didn't get there. After a long chase I got within shooting distance and tried a few shots, but I was so out of breath they widely missed the target. Then a bright idea occurred, though one risky of losing the game. The otter was bearing down on a gap between two mountain peaks, intending to pass through them. If it should turn the other way, toward Cold river, there would be many miles to traverse. To the lake was only a half mile, so I took a "bee-line" for the lower end of the ravine, knowing the small mountain stream was frozen to the bottom and would not shelter the otter. If it didn't show up in due time, I would investigate the reason.

Ambushing isn't the fairest but is the surest means to the end in a hunt. It also insures sudden and instant, thereby humane death, and the pelt isn't mutilated beyond repair. A quick whistle and accurate aim accomplished the purpose just as Mr. Otter reached the dead water of the brook and was nosing around for an opening in the ice. I walked over leisurely to pick it up, after having reloaded the gun. It lay within two feet of a hole between the ice and bank!



# SANDY'S WOODCRAFT

By E. H. Kreps

SANDY STUART was happy. He was on his way to new trapping grounds. As his canoe glided swiftly and silently down the rapid river, each turn revealing new and promising territory, he speculated on the quantity and kind of game found there, and his thoughts dwelt pleasantly on the fur-bearing animals which he knew inhabited the dense, black woods. It was all new country to him. Few white men had ever penetrated this part, and the Indians also refused to venture into this almost unknown district, for it was the home of an evil spirit which brought bad luck to any who located there. Sandy smiled as he thought of the weird tales he had heard. He was not superstitious and he did not believe in evil spirits. The bad luck of the Indians meant good luck for him, for here was practically virgin territory, country that had not been trapped for many years, and wouldn't he reap a rich harvest of valuable furs!

The canoe glided silently on in the quickening current and the sound of rushing water reached Sandy's sensitive ears. Evidently there were rapids ahead and he must proceed with caution. Great dangers might lurk in these unknown waters. Back paddling a little, he slowed his frail craft before rounding the bend. Below him foamed a rapid of considerable length, but it did not look at all dangerous. It was contrary to his custom to attempt to run an unknown rapid; but this one seemed so easy that Sandy decided quickly to try it. The canoe shot forward and under Sandy's deft strokes was piloted steadily down through the rushing channel. Here and there patches of boiling water showed the location of ragged boulders; but it was easy to keep clear of them. Near the lower end of the rough water the stream made a bend and here the current drove hard against an island of granite rock. Sandy realized fully that here he must do his very best work, or the canoe would be dashed against the rock. But he did not see the submerged boulder lying near the island and the heavily

laden canoe struck it with its full force. There was a crashing sound of breaking bark and cedar ribs and the sudden impact threw Sandy forward into the canoe while the craft turned quickly as if on a pivot and pitched over on its side. Sandy's head came violently in contact with the granite rock and the world suddenly faded away.

For a few moments after he regained consciousness, he could not remember what had happened; but as he sat up and looked around the whole sickening event was quickly recalled. His head ached frightfully and he found that he had sustained a bad cut and a severe bruise. He was on the granite island just clear of the rushing water and the canoe was nowhere to be seen. And Sandy had no hope of ever seeing it or any of his outfit again.

It was a desperate and heartbreaking situation, and a hardier and more seasoned man than Sandy, if such could be found, might have been appalled at the prospect. In a straight line a hundred miles of the roughest kind of wilderness lay between him and civilization. But he could not travel in a straight line, for large lakes, streams and swamps would be encountered, and they would add many miles to the distance. It would mean at least six days' travel, for the very best he could do in this rough country was to travel twenty miles in a day. This could be done only by a man properly clothed and well nourished by sufficient food. Sandy had no food now and procuring it would require time and greatly lengthen his journey. Yet return to civilization he must for he could not stay here without an outfit.

His dream of the fur harvest had faded. It was already almost time to commence trapping and at the very best it would be a month before he could get back with a new outfit, longer if cold weather set in and closed the lakes with ice. By that time the best part of the season would be gone. But the proposition now before him was a serious one, for his chances were just about even for getting back to the settlements alive. He proceeded to take inventory of his possessions. The clothing that he wore and the few articles that were in his pockets was the sum of it. Even his outfit of clothing was incomplete, for his hat was missing; but he knew he

could spare that easily. Each pocket was emptied in turn and the contents piled upon the rock. The most valuable possessions were a pocket knife of fair size with two keen blades, and a waterproof match box containing about two dozen matches. There was also a fishing line and a package of fish hooks, two pieces of twine and six feet of codfish line, a handkerchief and a two-inch square of plug smoking tobacco, but his pipe was missing and he now remembered that he had taken it from his mouth and laid it in the canoe just before starting down the rapids. The compass was also gone, for it he had placed before him on top of a pack so that he could get his bearings at any time without stopping the paddle.

He looked at the sun and was surprised to see that it had not yet reached the zenith. The time he judged was about ten o'clock, and it had been the middle of the afternoon when his mishap occurred. He reasoned that he must have lain unconscious eighteen or nineteen hours. And he did not wonder at this for the injury to his head had been severe and even now he felt very faint by spells.

Carefully replacing his valuables in his pockets he began to look for a means of reaching the shore. It was only a short distance and the water was very rough, but appeared to be shallow enough for wading. He found on the rock near him the canoe paddle which he had been using and he thought he must have gripped it unconsciously when he was thrown from the canoe and that it had thus been thrown onto the rock beside him. By going slowly, using the paddle to steady himself, he found he could easily wade the space between him and the shore. But the effort was almost too much, for when he reached the shore he was feeling very faint and he had to sit down and rest. He washed his head in the cool, clear water and felt better then. To him it was plain that he was not now in condition to travel and he concluded to make some sort of camp and stay here until the next morning.

But first he must find some kind of food. Fish, he decided, would be the easiest to procure. Doubtless he would find a good pool at the foot of the rapids and on rounding the bend he found that it was as he had surmised, for the rapid ended in a long, deep pool of very promising water. Luckily the fish

in the wilderness are more easily caught than those of the streams of the thickly populated districts and the crudest kind of tackle will do as well as the finest.

Cutting a long, slender pole, Sandy attached the line and then began looking for bait. He could not find any insects large enough, but down at the weedy border of the pool he found a tiny frog and this was soon impaled on the hook. It fell with a little splash and almost instantly a large trout rose to it, took it leisurely into his mouth and turned to seek the quiet depths. Sandy gave a quick, steady pull and threw the fish onto the shore, where he clutched it quickly and removed it before it did too much damage to the bait. Rapping its head on the butt of the rod to kill it, he threw it upon the bank, rebaited his hook and tried again. The performance was duplicated and Sandy was rewarded with a second slightly smaller fish, and with the two he seemed content.

On a sheltered spot at the foot of a bank he proceeded to make a place for cooking his fish. First he brought the canoe paddle and with it he dug a hollow into the bank. Over the excavation he built a fire of dry wood and finally he dragged a couple of dead spruce trees and threw them on top. The fire burned brightly and while it was forming coals Sandy dressed the fish and skewered them on sharpened sticks. By this time the smaller wood had burned away and the under side of the spruce logs were glowing coals which threw their heat down into the hollow beneath. Here Sandy fixed the fish in place, close beneath the glowing coals, where they would bake and not get smoked by the fire. How he longed for salt; but it was a luxury which he must do without until he again reached the homes of his fellowmen.

Sandy was hungry and by the time the fish were cooked he was ready for food of any kind, with salt or without, and he did not find the unsalted fish as bad as he feared they would be. But he missed the bannock and tea, especially the latter, for he seldom ate a meal without drinking a generous quantity of the beverage which in the northern wilderness is looked upon as almost a necessity. Then when the meal was finished he was seized with an almost overwhelming longing for a smoke.



It was obvious that he would have to make a pipe and he wondered what kind of wood he could use. It must be something which would not burn too readily or taste too strong. The only woods in that locality were spruce, tamarock, cedar, birch, balsam, and popular. Birch was the only one that seemed likely to answer and Sandy knew that even this wood burned very readily, and while pondering the question his eye chanced to rest on the canoe paddle and he knew at once that this was just what he wanted. It was made of maple and if the gowl were properly charred on the inside he felt quite sure that it would make a fairly satisfactory pipe. With considerable patience he fashioned it into shape and dug out the interior, then made a hole for the stem and finally burned the inside with embers from the fire until it was smooth and black. The stem he made of two pieces, closely fitted and with a groove cut down the center on the flat side of each. These two pieces he then bound together by wrapping them from end to end with a small piece of twine.

He realized that about one smoke a day was all he could afford. The Indians sometimes smoked the bark of a red shrub and finding some of it, he scraped off the bark and dried it. But it had a peppery flavor and no satisfying qualities whatever. If he could use it at all it would be by mixing it with tobacco and he concluded to try it that way next day.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in gathering wood for the night. He dragged together as large pieces as he could handle in his weakened condition and burned them into shorter lengths by crossing two or three over the fire. He pulled bark from dead cedar logs and built a sort of thatch shelter, inside of which he made a bed of evergreen boughs, and when it was finished he surveyed it with satisfaction. He needed only a blanket to insure comfort, but this he could not have and as it was not yet very cold weather he did not anticipate any great discomfort. What did bother him was that without a blanket so much wood was needed and having no axe he must give up so much of his time hunting for wood, when he could otherwise be traveling.

Having his camp now in good shape for the night he got his

fishing pole again and started for the pool to get fish for supper and breakfast. As he approached the stream a spruce partridge strutted out before him and flew up into the lower boughs of a tree. Here would be a change of food if he could secure the bird and a plan was quickly conceived and put into execution. Taking from his pocket one of the pieces of twine, he made a slip noose which he tied to the end of his fishing rod, then opening up the noose he carefully reached up towards the foolish, unsuspecting bird, slipped the noose over its head and gave a quick jerk. The partridge was brought fluttering to the ground, its neck broken by the sudden jerk.

Sandy had saved the anal fin of one of the trout and fixing it on the hook for bait he cast it out into the pool. In only a few minutes he had a nice fish and he kept on fishing until he had caught four more. With five fish and a partridge he figured he would now have food enough to last until the next evening, and thus he could travel all days without losing time searching for food.

As he was turning to leave the pool there was impressed upon his vision a fleeting glimpse of a bright red object down along the shore below him. In the big woods the natural colors soon become familiar to the traveler and any unnatural shade or form is noticed as quickly as the eye rests upon it. Sandy turned to look again for the object which had caught his eye and found that it really was a bright red something clinging to a submerged snag at the water's edge. Going down to investigate he was overjoyed to find that it was a blanket—his own Hudson Bay blanket which had floated there from the wrecked canoe. And he knew that inside of the blanket was a tea pail, some tea and a chunk of bacon. It was a part of the outfit that he was using regularly while camping, so that supplies would not have to be opened each evening, the bulk of the goods having been made into packs convenient for portaging. The air in the tea pail had helped to support the blanket which was tightly rolled about it, and while the blanket was now thoroughly soaked and the pail filled with water, the snag kept it from going to the bottom. Surely good fortune was smiling on him again and his spirits mounted.

Sandy took the water-soaked bundle to his camp and unrolled it. The tea, of course, was ruined, but he thought there must still be some good in it, so he carefully squeezed out the water and spread the tea on a piece of bark by the side of the fire to dry. The bacon was in good condition. It would to a certain extent supply the need of salt, for it was summer cured bacon and quite salty. The blanket he formed into a long roll which he jammed into the crotch of a small tree and then twisted it, first one end then the other to remove as much of the water as possible. This done he stretched it on poles by the side of the fire to dry.

The prospect had now lost much of its blackness and Sandy felt quite at ease as he sat by the fire and prepared an evening meal. He cut slender strips of bacon and placed them inside of the fish, one in each before placing them to broil. The partridge he cooked in the same way, but reserved most of it, also three of the fish for the following day. He made some tea and while it was very weak and flat, it was better than none. After supper he mixed a little tea with a small quantity of tobacco and found it made a reasonably good smoke. It was the best thing he had found yet except pure tobacco, and he dried the leaves of the tea he had drank for supper with the intention of saving them for smoking. After a while he dropped down on the bough bed and went to sleep.

In the morning Sandy was not long in preparing for his journey. He made some tea and ate the partridge for breakfast. His head was sore; but otherwise he felt quite equal to the long journey that was before him. The blanket which was now almost completely dry he made into a roll, the other articles inside, and to it he fixed the codfish line in the form of shoulder straps. He rolled pieces of thin bark around the cords to keep them from hurting his shoulders and it made a light pack that carried very comfortably.

Sandy traveled rapidly until noon, in a southerly direction, making use of the sun as a guide. He made only a few short stops to rest and covered quite a distance. About noon he struck a small marsh and finding here an abundance of cranberries he gathered some for lunch and they tasted very good to him after his three meals of fish and game. He made good

time in the afternoon also and towards evening he began looking for a suitable camping ground. He selected a place at the edge of a spot of burned ground where there was much dead timber and many dead trees lying on the ground. He found a place where three trees had fallen across one another and with a very little work he moved one so that all three crossed at the same place. This he knew would make a fire that would last a couple of hours and after the trees were once burned through he knew that he could move the pieces. He gathered other wood until he knew he would have enough for the night, then built a shelter of bark and boughs and fixed a bed of evergreens inside.

While gathering the wood he saw a number of well beaten rabbit trails and now he decided that he would try to capture one of the rabbits. He made three sets of figure four triggers from green poplar sticks and finding small logs he placed them across the trails supported by the triggers. He was sure that if any rabbits ran the trails they would at least spring the traps, either in trying to pass under the logs, or by gnawing at the triggers. A freshly cut green stick is very likely to be sampled as food by a rabbit, and especially if it has been handled, for the contact of a human hand seems to make the bait all the more alluring.

His supper that evening did not satisfy his appetite, for he had only two of the fish left and the bacon was too scarce and valuable for its saltiness to be eaten at one meal. But he felt quite sure that he would have a rabbit or two in the morning, and until he could get this or other food he would have to go without breakfast.

The night passed uneventfully and Sandy rested in comfort rolled in his woolen blanket by the side of the fire. At the first indication of dawn, he went to look at the traps. It was still so dark that he had to walk stooped so that he could see the brush silhouetted against the sky and thus avoid injury from contact. The first trap was unsprung and Sandy's optimistic spirit suffered a shock. The second trap was sprung, but had failed to make a catch. Feeling quite depressed he hurried to the third trap and here he was delighted to find a large rabbit pinched by the hind legs and alive. He killed it and went back

to camp where he quickly dressed it and started it to roasting. But hurrying the cooking as he did, it was late before he had finished his breakfast. Then he took the triggers from the rabbit traps and wrapped them in his blanket along with his other possessions, and was soon on trail. The sky was clouded and a rain storm seemed imminent. Only an occasional break in the clouds revealed, by a greater degree of brightness, the location of the sun, and travel was difficult, for Sandy had no other reliable way of keeping his sense of direction. The clouds became denser and after awhile he found it necessary to resort to other means of determining which part of the horizon was south. By resting the point of his pocket knife blade on his thumb nail he discerned a thin, vague shadow, and by this he could instantly determine the position of the sun, then he could easily locate the south, with sufficient accuracy to enable him to travel in a general southerly direction. He didn't stop for lunch at noon, for he wanted to make as much of a journey before camping as possible.

It was late that afternoon when he found a suitable camping site. It was along a lake shore and Sandy decided that he must try the lake for fish and be sure that he could secure some for food before he made camp here. He found nearby a stream emptying into the lake and here at the mouth of the stream he tried the fishing. The fish fairly swarmed in the mouth of the creek and seemed ravenously hungry. So was Sandy and he did not feel content until he had piled ten of the trout on the bank. With these he knew he could at least satisfy his hunger for the evening and the following day.

He made a fire and started three fish to cooking before doing anything towards making camp, then while the fish were roasting he gathered bark and started building a shelter. He made his roof thick and rather large as a protection against the rain which he felt sure would come soon. Then he ate his supper and after that he gathered wood and again set his rabbit traps. He spent the night in reasonable comfort, although it rained and the roof leaked so that he had to move about several times to keep from getting wet.

He had no rabbits in the morning, but he had plenty of fish and he knew that he would not suffer much for the lack of

food. Still he was rather tired of fish. He saw considerable small game during the day and after a number of attempts at capturing rabbits and partridges he succeeded in getting another spruce partridge or fool hen by snaring it. He saw plenty of signs of big game in places and once he saw a magnificent caribou with a great rack of antlers. How he longed for the rifle that was lying somewhere in the bottom of the river far to the north.

Travel this day was very disagreeable for it rained more or less all day and Sandy was wet to the skin. Moreover, it was cold and as the rain ceased the chill increased. It required a hot fire and plenty of hot tea to make him feel his usual self and he had to spend the entire evening by the side of a bright fire to dry his clothes. He removed his shirt and trousers and by hanging them where the heat reached them constantly he was enabled to dry them, as well as his under clothes.

During the day's travel the thought had occurred to him that if he could make a bow and arrow he might kill game with certainty. He saved the longer feathers from the partridge for feathering the arrows, and before making camp he found a small, straight ash sapling from which he cut a four-foot stick. That night he sat up until midnight and while his clothes were drying he whittled out a bow and seasoned the wood as best he could by the heat of the fire. The arrows he made of straight, half-inch sticks, about thirty inches long, pointed and the points hardened in the fire. He fastened three partridge feathers to the small end of each arrow shaft. It was a crude outfit; but Sandy had confidence in it.

Morning found the ground frozen and whitened by a light skiff of snow. The weather was the kind that stirs the blood of the trapper, for it marks the approach of trapping time, and Sandy's thoughts dwelt often on trapping subjects. Travel was tedious, for a large lake compelled him to make a long detour, and then, too, he lost time in pursuit of game. The bow and arrows were both a success and a failure, for while he succeeded in killing a partridge and a rabbit, he found that his shooting was so inaccurate that he lost a lot of time in his hunting. He wished he had a supply of snare wire for rabbits. An Indian would have made out very well with a few pieces of

twine, but Sandy knew from experience that a rabbit would bite his twine snare every time. He had never succeeded in learning the red man's secret.

He camped that night near the end of one of the long bays which extended from the lake in all directions. He had lost so much time in avoiding these projecting arms that it seemed to him he had not accomplished much in that day's travel. While he had no way of knowing how far he had traveled since he started on his journey, he thought he must be more than half way back to the settlements. If he had traveled in a reasonably straight direction, he knew he must now be somewhere near the river up which he had come on the first stage of his trip.

The next morning he found a stream flowing westward. Perhaps it was a branch of the river, but he did not dare follow it far out of his course, and he started southward again. The country was very rough and was spotted here and there with patches of second growth bush where rabbits were abundant. There were many small lakes and streams and it looked to Sandy like a good fur country. He saw two beaver families and the cuttings along the streams indicated that there were plenty of beavers about. Caribou trails were abundant.

That evening he found another quite large stream flowing to the southwest and he decided to follow this stream. He found a porcupine near his camp site and killed it with a club. He was not fond of porcupine; but it was food and a change from what he had been having. He ate the last scrap of bacon that night and he was now reduced to a strictly fresh meat diet. This, however, was not as alarming as the fact that he had just two pipes of tobacco left.

Sandy followed down stream until noon next day and then he came out to a lake of several miles in extent. He caught some trout here and broiled them. Then after lunch he started southward along the lake shore. Somehow the country here looked familiar to him. When he came to the outlet of the lake and found that a small river flowed south he knew that this was the stream up which he had poled his heavily laden canoe on his journey into the woods. He even found the place where he had camped over night on the third day

out. He was three days walk from the railroad; but he made up his mind to make a raft of some kind and take a chance on the river.

That afternoon and evening he burned dead cedar logs into twelve-foot lengths. With six such logs, averaging a foot in diameter, he would have a raft with which he could safely navigate the stream, providing he could find means of fastening them together. If he had an axe he would cut dovetails into the logs and bind them all together with a three-sided pole, but he had no axe. He could think of only one practical scheme and that was to bind poles across top and bottom at each end. This he did, using his codfish line, supplemented with a generous quantity of spruce and tamarack roots, to tie the poles, and while the raft had a very primitive look it appeared to be strong enough for his purpose. An hour after sunrise next morning he pushed his raft into the stream and stepped aboard. For two days he drifted down stream. A couple of times his raft grounded in shallow water; but he floated it again without much difficulty. Towards evening of the second day, as he rounded a bend, he saw below him a man in a canoe and hailed him as he drew near.

"Have you any tobacco?" asked Sandy as the canoe pulled up alongside of the raft. Then, as he feverishly whittled a pipe of tobacco and started it to burning, he told the young man of his mishap and of his long journey back to civilization. "Will you go back again after you get another outfit" asked his new acquaintance. "No," said Sandy, "I may go trapping somewhere but not as far as that," and he thought of the big lake of many bays and the rough country 'round about, which had looked so promising to him.





# TRAPPING THE WICOMICO

## Chapter I

By Dick Wood

Photographs by the Author

NAME and destination?" asked the captain of the passenger boat Wicomico, as we ploughed through the river of the same name toward the Chesapeake Bay.

I supplied the name and stated destination as "anywhere there's muskrating."

"Mannings' wharf, first stop, two bits," and the captain-skipper-pilot went about collecting fares while I gazed out the two-by-four window at the vast stretches of Maryland three-edged grass extending from the water's edge. The sun shone down warm for a February day and I climbed on the upper deck and sat in the life boat watching passing sail boats and huge buzzards circling lazily around over the marsh. Occasionally one would poise uncertainly, then flop down on a muskrat house, evidently spying a struggling muskrat, biding the time until it should so weaken itself as to become easy prey.

The buzzard is a lazy bird and prefers to be relieved of having to kill its own food. If the prospective prey weakens to a defenseless stage, its end is sometimes hastened for a speedy repast. However, this bird takes no chances, but first pecks out the eyes and perhaps waits for its victim to die. It is then invariably eaten on the spot—never carried away to a safer retreat as a hawk would do.

The vulture is a great nuisance to the marsh trapper, invariably destroying every dead muskrat found drowned by the tide water and often killing those found in a defenseless state. Yet, were it not for these birds the marsh would be even more stinking and unendurable from the millions of rotting carcasses washed up by the tide. It is surprising how quickly a buzzard can discover a carcass in the thick grass and black muck of the marsh. Whether they go by sight, or smell, or both, I'm not sure, but more likely by both, because

a carcass is generally found when hidden from sight. It has been proven, that the crow, another bird of ill-repute, has an unusually keen eye-sight and employs this faculty in securing its food.

The shrill signal for Mannings' wharf called me down to collect my duffle together, and it was pitched off onto the wharf as the boat guided alongside. I was the only passenger to leave the launch, and except for a grinning negro lad who came down after "Massa's" mail, was alone in a strange land when the boat left. A few bags of fertilizer had been unloaded and I wondered what would be farmed in this desolate marsh land. The pickaninny stood staring at my "furriner" attire and dunnage.

"I reckon you don't be a detecktive, suh?" he asked at length. Sensing some fun, I replied, "Yes, I am Chief Burns himself. I got a report to look after a negro lad—" and I began describing his appearance to fit the subject in hand. "Now, I'll see if my handcuffs are in this bag"—but I had been talking to the bags of fertilizer for quite some time; the negro boy had vanished as quickly and quietly through the marsh grass as if swallowed up by the earth.

The wharf was high and dry, but on every side there was water and muck. A narrow driveway led toward some distant shrubbery that I took to be highland, but to all appearances the muck might be anywhere from ankle to knee-deep. Now, I felt chagrined at not having first secured some necessary information from the negro concerning the local trappers and how they could be reached—for I had come down to sunny Maryland to participate in some 'rat trapping. There was nothing else to do but strike out through the marsh. It might be three days before the Wicomico boat returned for all I knew, as twice-a-week boat service is very common on Maryland streams, and I well know that no one would likely make their appearance at the wharf, until the next day. So I opened up a bag and changed my shoes for hip rubber boots. Donning these, I shouldered my dunnage and started along the line of least resistance—the mucky pathway.

My progress was slow, what with 80 pounds of baggage and 20 more of muck on my boots it made each step a hundred

pound pull and I figured I must have carried an aggregate of several tons in traversing that half-mile stretch of mud. The sun was near its zenith, and to one direct from the Canadian border and thirty below weather, it seemed very near the earth. Perspiration beaded on my forehead and trickled down my face. I wished I were back in the cool North Woods plowing through knee-deep snow instead of black mud, even though when there enduring zero weather, I had anticipated with delight a trip to sunny Southland. Now I had all that was coming to me. I looked about for a dry place to drop my baggage so as to remove my top coat. Nothing nearer than a strip of woods a hundred yards distant was in sight, so I staggered along toward the highland.

"Hands up! P. D. Q.!" caused me to drop the baggage in each hand instantly in six inches of slimy mud within 10 feet of dry land. A duffle bag carried by an improvised trumpline, Canuck fashion, following suit.

I looked ahead into a bunch of shrubbery from whence the commanding voice came, desiring a look at the nerry one.

"Maybe ye didn't get me the first time," and the click of a gun hammer reminded me I had received an order.

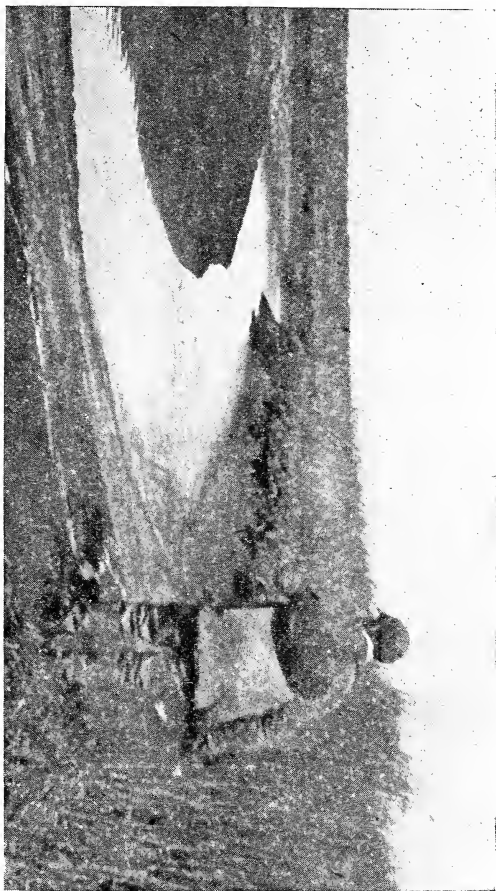
"Gimme time to get 'em up; it's too hot for strenuous action. Look, you've caused me to splatter mud all over my clothes. What're you after, my wad? If so, you'll find a dollar and sixty-seven cents in my left hind pocket. Be careful in reaching for it not to touch the trigger of that .45 automatic," as I felt as if a practical joke was being played at my expense and got madder the more I thought of my personal belongings soaking up water. As my hands went up a big, brawny man stepped out of the bushes, lowering his gun, which I noted to be a large bore muzzle-loading shot gun, but at the word "automatic" the muzzle-loader again covered me and its owner became all attention.

"Now, I know ye're a detective. What do ye mean by scaring my nigger an' telling him a pasel of lies? I know yourn business here. Ye're after gunners an' I'm one of 'em, but I happen to hold the high card in this game. Here, Amos, get hold of them grips. Now march ahead, an' if ye make a move toward thet hip pocket, ye're a goner, get me?"

I most emphatically did. As I stepped up ahead of the gunman, the negro I had seen an hour before grinned sarcastically out of the saw-grass. One thing about the matter that pleased me was in having my baggage carried.

As we plodded along through the marsh, I reflected on my predicament. I hadn't mentioned a roll of bills in my hatband; also I had lied about the gun, not having any. I have been fired at from ambush once or twice in approaching too close to hidden moonshine stills in the Cumberland; held up once in the capital city of Tennessee; thrown overboard in a row on a fishing schooner in the Gulf of Mexico, and been tangled up with a few other adventures, but this was my first experience at being taken a prisoner for no apparent reason. However, I didn't feel inclined to argue the matter, so long as we were going toward some definite destination; and it wasn't any more tiresome walking with hands up than toting an 80-pound load.

We at length came to a pine woods grove and walking through this came out to cleared land in sight of a spacious farm house. I expected to be halted at this point, but instead was marched right up to the house. On approaching, a fellow of rather uncouth appearance, to say the least, strode out of the house and glared sullenly at me. Then he and my custodian had a pow-wow off to themselves, while I sat down on the porch to endure a cheap cigar secured at some village grocery store. Soon the two came back and began a cross-examination. I told them my name, proffering a cigar, which seemed to create a favorable impression. They in turn invited me to "have a dip" of their snuff, which they used incessantly, spitting columns of black amber. I was glad the black cigar in my jaws excused me from accepting their offering. Turning pockets inside out convinced them I was as near defenseless as penniless, yet, there was something lacking. I was told to make myself "at home" until the elder man got back from Cressy's (wherever that was) and then if I wasn't a "detective" they'd show me some trapping. But they did not hesitate to convey their opinion and insinuate at the fate of one caught prying into their personal business. For some reason I was still suspicioned, and though guns were laid



**A Maryland Muskrat Marsh**

aside, they watched me like a hawk watches a spring broiler. Taking the matter good-naturedly and unconcernedly, helped things considerably in my favor.

Just about the time the captive was being considered a problem more desirable elsewhere, along comes one of those country-shrewd fur buyers. He drives up in a sort of buggy drawn by two shaggy mules and alights with the air of a movie actor to announce he is paying the highest prices of any fur dealer in Maryland, and if they have any 'rats on hand he'd advise they sell in view of an anticipated drop in the market. The buyer addresses my impromptu hosts as Mannings, Sam and Calvin, and starts in giving them under-the-hat fur dope. I was quite taken back at the mention of Mannings, for these were the people I had heard spoken of as extensive 'ratters and had had in mind to visit—though not so abruptly. They all walked over to a fur curing house and the fur man run his eyes over a bunch of several hundred 'rat skins. I followed along to get a look at the skins and heard the buyer comment on some of them being damaged, and inclined to run small. All the time he has his check book out, and in an eloquent outburst of generosity, says he'll allow a flat price for the lot, kitted and damaged out. The price is agreed upon, the Mannings understanding it applies only for browns, and when the buyer states he cannot pay any more for blacks, there's a halt in the deal.

Without any anticipation of the result, I substantiated the fur buyer's statement that blacks were selling at brown prices at the New York fur auction sales the past week, having attended the sales, mentioning something about "dyeing not being done this season," and the fur dealer added weight to my words by inquiring about certain places and names familiar to the trade. Then he asked me if I had bought any furs lately of a certain person I learned later to be a "gunner," and this question worked wonders with the Mannings. I could see the fur buyer was taking me for some other man of his acquaintance, evidently a retired buyer, and it was dawning on the "gunners" who held me in their possession that possibly after all they had barked up the wrong tree.

The furs were bought and loaded onto the buggy, but just before he left he was called aside by Sam Mannings and it did not take much guessing on my part to know the subject of their conversation. Soon the buyer yelled "Gid-up," and the mules started at a dog trot down the sandy road, the cart wheels wobbling from side to side.

Sam moseyed over my way. "Wal, I reckon we have been mistaken in the man, but we shore thought ye war thet orney detecttive who has been moseying 'round here. Donohue says ye ust to buy over in Dorchester county, but couldn't recollect yer name. We'd be right glad to have ye stay with us a few days; the tide's running good now an' the ratting'll never be better."

I consented to stay and unpacked my grips, donning corduroy and flannel suitable for the marsh work. After a few hours' familiarity, we were as mutually agreeable as if no differences had occurred. A bountiful supper was set on the board by Cal (who acted as cook), consisting of fried oysters, secured from the Chesapeake, stewed muskrat, huckleberry sauce, hot biscuits a la Maryland, jams and black coffee. After the dishes were herded up and cleared away, we smoked domestic cigars and exchanged experiences concerning the outdoors. The Manning "boys" were considerably interested in hunting tales of the Northern snowland of which they only had a vague idea. Having had some little experience with fur bearers and game animals of the Northern bush, as well as methods of hunting them employed by the natives, I was able to hold my audience more or less spellbound with lurid descriptions of chases after bear, deer, fisher, marten, otter, lynx, beaver, etc. They in turn had some very unusual stories to relate; of special interest, their difficulties in catching "a charmed muskrat" and a stray otter, "sly as the devil," as Sam expressed it. The muskrat turned out to be one minus three feet, which accounted for its seemingly miraculous escapes from steel traps; and the otter was an old toothless fellow, wise in proportion to its age.

While mid-winter, there was no snow or ice outside; yet, the nights were cool from the salt-water breeze blowing and we sat in the old colonial home before a large fire of crack-

ling logs. The house, like most abodes in this section, was built long before the Civil War—in fact, I saw a building said to have been built in 1733, or thereabouts, and stayed a week in another one built previous to this date. A short man could have stood up straight in the fireplace, and many cranes and hooks were suspended from an iron bar for use in cooking over the fire. We often in the days that followed cooked johnny-cake in an old Dutch oven over coals in front of the fire, while a pot of “marsh rabbit” boiled over the flames, suspended from the iron rod. A huge walnut mantle board supported a clock of ancient make, perhaps imported from England, as were many other of the house trimmings. The house was spacious and rather bare of furniture; part of it being used as a granary; part as a curing room; part as “company” room, and the kitchen end only utilized by Calvin and Sam for living, eating and sleeping quarters. When we returned at a late hour, I was escorted by Sam, holding a smoky kerosene lamp in one hand, through dark halls, two bare rooms and up two flights of stairs to the “company” room. And here is where I thought of a book I had read some time in the past, captioned “The Haunted House.” Sam hoped I’d sleep well and made his exit down squeaky, groaning stairs; and standing still, I heard his foot-steps until they faded into the myriad other noises of the mysterious house.

Next I heard the patter, patter of little feet, and looking around, spied a rat of huge proportions making a double-quick getaway. The bed was one of those ancient affairs, requiring a step-ladder to reach, reminding me of Adirondack Bill’s upper bunk in his log cabin. On the plaster ceiling were sundry mud-dobbers’ abodes and in an obscure corner a wasp’s nest. At first glance I thought the ceiling was decorated with a festoon of Japanese design, but on closer inspection noted it to be the grotesque nets of house spiders. Needless to say, I searched for and wasn’t disappointed in finding a few specimens of that royal gentleman which I never got far enough along in entomology to classify, but goes by the common appellation of bed-bug! They seemed delighted at my arrival, perhaps having become lonesome by themselves in that semi-vacated house, and grinned from ear to ear. I



threw the covering down, wrinkled up a pillow to look as if the bed had been occupied, and sat down in a deep arm-chair, placing my feet on the top of a bureau. Next I lit a smudge in the way of a Virginia cheroot, and dosed off into slumberland.

Before long I began to "see things." The bed-bugs were holding religious services, debating on the disposition of my carcass. They lined up in front of me in as perfect array as the English army reviewing before King George. I shuffled my feet toward them which stood them off their distance, yet I could see blood in their eyes. My destiny seemed sealed; my fate doomed. However, I hadn't crawled out of an ice-hole in Raquette River or swam to shore in shark waters for nothing; the instinct of life was strong and asserted itself; I made a grand rush for freedom, down squeaky stair steps, through endless hallways, and out into the very, very open marshland. And here dangers confronted me at every hand. I felt myself sinking down, down, down in a bottomless quagmire of black muck, and the "stinking gases" peculiar to these bogs were choking me. Just as the muck reached my ears, and it seemed inevitable that I should be engulfed, a mammoth pelican, or some such fowl, fished me out with its beak and prepared forthwith to partake of its prey. But this time I was snatched away from the bird of prey by a monstrous alligator, which carried me on subterranean explorations until it appeared my lungs would burst for want of air. Then the alligator got into a scrap with a man-eating fish, and while they were fighting over the choice bits of my body, I struggled to freedom by climbing an aquatic vine. Thereafter I ran so fast, hitting only the high places, that I didn't sink into the muck and in time reached the "Big House" I had just left. (Note—Down South the main building on a plantation is generally spoken of as the "Big House"). Creeping quietly up the stairway, I heard strains of music that seemed as melodious as it was uncanny in that environment. Tiptoeing to the door of my room, I looked in and beheld a wonderful sight and listened to a wonderful song, old and in this case at least, deep in meaning. It was sung with fervor by a choir of bed-bugs rowed up on the foot-board of the bed. Their mouths

opened wide as the strains pealed forth: "God be with you till we meet again!"

"Hel-p, what the devil," as I picked myself up off the floor and righted the old arm-chair. "Well, well, I must have gone to sleep in that blooming old rocker, and—" There came a heavy pounding on the door, and in walked Sam.

"What's all thet noise about; here I've been knocking the skin off my knuckles on thet door—thought shore ye' wus dead. The tide's coming in fast an' we've gotta soon get out on the marsh."

"Huh, I heard you knocking and sprang out of bed half asleep; must have walked over that chair in the dark," I lied readily enough.

"Well, how did yer sleep in the bridal chamber?" I was asked at the breakfast table.

"Oh, fine," as I reached for another buckwheat cake, "but think I ate a little too much of that muskrat pot pie for supper."

Breakfast over, I put my camera in working order while the trappers got their gunny sacks and other equipment; then we started for the traps, Cal taking the Wico Creek lines; Sam and I the river marsh.

"The tide's more favorable than it's been in many a day," my companion remarked. "We're bound to have a pile of 'rats afore night." And, as it happened, we did both sweat under a gunny sack full of them before we got off the marsh.

## Chapter II

In all the days I have spent on the marshes of the Eastern Coast, there is none I enjoyed more than the day Sam and I "ran" his line on the Wicomico river marsh and came in at night with 67 'rats secured from 150 set traps. Sam had predicted good luck that morning, and when a marsh 'ratter makes a prediction it's pretty apt to come to pass. There was an east wind blowing; and an east wind always brings in a high tide in this vicinity, as it backs the ocean water up in the Chesapeake Bay. Perhaps the 'rats stir a little more than usual just before a high tide; at any rate, those caught are apt to be drowned and safely waiting for the trapper.



**A Catch in the Marsh Grass**

In the river marsh the three-edge grass reaches a growth of about five to seven feet in height, and grows thicker than any Mississippi cane-brake on the map. Many small creeks and spring branches penetrate the marsh, winding about toward the river. Muskrat "leads" are as thick as net-work where they tunnel from house to house and creek to house. On tide water marshes, the trapper follows these creek beds during low tide and sets his traps at the entrance to the leads that are exposed. Of course, he must make the set so the incoming tide will not interfere with making a catch. Many times he follows the lead up, especially where the entrance is too deep under water for a set, and places a trap where it comes out in the marsh grass. As a lead may extend inward for a couple of hundred yards, you wonder how the trappers follow them when they are under ground. Well, at first sight watching their unerring skill in "tracking" up the leads, it appears to me more of an instinct than a matter of trapping craft, but later I learned, as for all things, there's a reason. In most cases the trapper has observed muddy water issuing from a lead where a rat may be struggling in a trap at its exit a hundred yards inland. If he catches a 'rat at an inland lead, the trapper scurries down to the nearest creek and examines the entrances of various burrows. In this manner he "spots" the right one, and thus becomes acquainted with the leads on his trapping grounds. Also, the lay of the land, position of houses and courses of the creeks are to be taken into consideration.

On marshes intersected by few streams and where the tide does not raise the water more than a few inches, trappers depend more on making their sets in runways, at the mouth of leads and on hammocks near the houses. The small hammock of grass cuttings are quite conspicuous in the marsh, and if they show fresh signs are dependable places for sets.

Sam and I drove to the marsh, alighted, tied up the donkey and rolled up the tops of our boots preparatory to hitting the mud and water trails. The first trap was set under a pile of rails at the edge of the marsh and held a struggling brown 'rat. The rails were lying around a deep spring hole that was

reputed to have no bottom; anyway I took the trapper's word for it when a rail didn't touch terra firma.

"Not many bad holes in the marsh now that's not been discovered and fenced in," said Sam, "when people first took to trapping in these parts, some of 'em lost their lives by getting into the deep holes with heavy packs of 'rats on their backs."

I didn't have to stretch my imagination to see the possibility of Sam's remarks, and steered clear of all such holes where my walking stick wouldn't touch bottom. You dry land lubbers needn't smile at the idea of a walking cane, for in the marsh it's a necessity. Of course, we utilized such as nature affords in the rough, cut about the height of the user, and such a balancing stick saves one many a slip and fall in the marsh. On my first trip over the marsh I kept pretty close to the heels of my guide for the reason at least a million trails led off through the marsh in all directions of the compass. In the high grass the trapper could get out of sight within a few minutes, and trailing in the water is rather a feat for an Indian, especially when it's all muddy.

The second 'rat we caught was black, but very small. In fact most all the 'rats I saw caught in Maryland this past season were unusually small. The trappers agree the 'rats are trapped too close, so they hardly get their full growth. Especially is this the case where the marsh is leased out each year to the highest bidder, as the trapper invariably makes the most of his opportunity. While the catches may be large enough in numbers, owing to the natural prolificness of the animal, the 'rats apparently lack a year's growth. If there should be a closed season of one year in this State the trappers wouldn't get so many yearling 'rats.

The time was noon or thereabouts and the sun shone down hot. When the sun shines hot over the marshes of Maryland, the buzzards are sure to be seen sailing around lazily overhead in their search for prey or carrion.

"Confound 'em birds, I'm going to bring my old 10-gauge goose gun along some of these days and make 'em a visit," Sam commented. "See, thar goes one up from the marsh; betchya my day's catch against a rotten apple seed it has just finished devouring one of my 'rats." I didn't take the bet,

for my keener optics had observed the remnants of a carcass dangling from the talons of the bird. When we arrived on the spot where it had flown, a foot was all that remained in the trap. On a nearby 'rat house were a few bones, but not enough fur to make a mouse bed. By the time I saw an average of three good \$2 'rats per trapper each day go regularly during the trapping season, I didn't blame any of the fellows for feeling sore at this king of aerial scavengers. On the whole they are beneficial, but in the case of the marsh trapping grounds, they are a detriment to the trapper.

Besides the buzzards there are crows, hawks and owls that occasionally steal a 'rat on the trapper. The expert trapper can generally make an accurate guess as to the bird that does the stealing. The hawk will often partly eat a carcass, then fly away with the balance to the nearest safe retreat; the buzzard drags the carcass to the nearest house, and there gathers the flock to a feast. I do not think crows do a great deal of damage to the marsh trappers.

Sam and I didn't let any marsh grass grow under our feet, as we had to hustle to get over the line before the tide would catch us. The experienced marsh 'ratter can get through the marsh mud and grass about as quickly as a "land" trapper. I'd say. The first day on the line, I was cutting corners before night. Sam had called his line a "short one," but if you could see the couple miles of marsh from an airship it would look like the hair spring in a watch.

We picked up a 'rat in about every third trap, so that the anticipation of a catch got down to a mathematical basis. Unlike the intensive small stream trapper, who remembers each set and wonders what is in the next one, Sam was only guided by the flag poles and took each set as it came. Possibly he couldn't remember one set from another until he had seen it and noticed some particular object that recalled to mind setting the trap. Of course, some few extremely profitable places are well remembered and a trap kept constantly on guard.

While we were in a hurry to get over the line before the incoming tide, quite a few traps that were found empty were taken up and reset at more favorable spots. Generally fresh

signs could be found within a rod of the old set. It doesn't take the muskrat long to get onto the location of a trap and they immediately begin to use another runway, but when the traps are moved often, there is small chance for even the shyest 'rat. Sometimes, however, the trapper runs afoul of some old toothless 'rat that baffles his every effort. Sam said to me, as we approached a set in the mouth of a lead, "Nothing here, and by gol Cal gets a 'rat here every time he runs the line; funny thing, for I've got my first one to catch in this lead."

At sundown we were still floundering around on the marsh, seemingly, to me, in circles. We had three or four dozen 'rats and they were increasing in weight all the time. I had the pockets of my hunting coat filled with them, and offered to carry Sam's gunny sack while he'd make a loop in the line. His dog-trot had never wavered since coming on the marsh, and I considered myself lucky in being able to keep within sight. Sometimes I would catch up by the time the trap was reset. We followed up one creek, cut across to the head of another, followed it down to its outlet into the big creek, and same thing over.

The moon came out and cast a glimmer on the water, making it impossible to tell whether a bog hole was shallow or bottomless. This spurred me up till I was again stepping in the tracks of Sam. Yet, this "old timer" wasn't infallible, but when he went down to the top of his boots I knew to step elsewhere. With the approaching dusk, thousands of nocturnal insects, birds, frogs and other wild life of the marsh proceeded to give us a serenade. Bull bats sailed around overhead; whip-poor-wills sang from the nearby woods. Huge night moths fluttered uncertainly over us, bound on a skylark. But if there was anything mysteriously beautiful about the gathering darkness on the marsh this particular evening, I was too blamed tired to notice it, or give a tinker's darn.

At 7.30 p. m. we came off the marsh into a farmer's orchard and counted our 'rats—67. Sam said he never fails to count his catch the minute he gets off the lines. This was an unusually large catch for Sam's much trapped grounds and he

was highly elated—more so, I think, because I happened to be along and helped lug the 'rats around.

"How do you manage to carry this many 'rats alone," I asked.

"Wall, I don't, I most alus hide 'em when I get a load, then go back an' pick 'em up."

It was a mile back to the buggy, but we soon made the grade owing to smooth ground, and dumped the 'rats into the back of the cart.

Driving home I noticed Sam casting an uneasy eye toward the west at frequent intervals. "What's on your mind, Sam?" I asked at length.

"Big storm comin' to-night, sur'n'hel. We'll have tu drive tu reach home first, too."

Old Backus, however, didn't require any urging, having become impatient at standing still so long, and we fairly sailed home behind his flying heels.

Cal had a pot of "marsh hare" going over the fire, and a Dutch oven filled with johnny-cake. Having had no dinner, we "fell to" like a couple of hungry wolves. Cal and I decided we'd have to drag Sam away from the table.

We had just got seated around the big fireplace when the brewing storm burst, and the rain came down in bucketfuls. Sam had been a schooner sailor on the Wicomico and Chesapeake Bay for several years, so could predict the weather like an almanac. After the first deluge, the rain came down steadily and adjusted for a night.

Cal had caught some thirty odd rats and after supper they were skinned and the carcasses dressed. The latter nearly filled a wooden tub, and were worth about fifteen cents each on the market. The skins were not stretched immediately, but left hanging on wires (away from mice and rats, which were in abundance) for the fur to dry out.

We were all tired enough to "hit the hay" at an early hour and slept the sleep of the just. This time I was oblivious to all nocturnal insects of the house and if they molested me during the night I didn't know it, or feel any ill effects the next day. In fact, except for the steady downpour of rain the



next morning, I was feeling greatly refreshed and in a proper mood to tackle another day on the marsh.

At breakfast we donned oiled coats, hats and trousers, such as fishermen and oystermen wear, and started out. A rain doesn't interfere much with the trapper anywhere for that matter; certainly not on a marsh. In fact, it's much nicer to be on the marsh in a rain, as the muck is kept washed off of you. When one has had a half dozen falls in the marsh on a dry day, the mud cakes on him till he has much the same appearance as a huge mud-dobber's nest.

The heavy rain had raised the water only a few inches, and the tide was late coming in, so we had no difficulty in wading. I accompanied Cal to his traps on a back shallow marsh and his regular lines on the Wicomico river. The first marsh wasn't cut up by creeks. There were an abundance of 'rats in their houses on this marsh. The leads were so thick a person couldn't step without landing in one. Cal bet on at least 40 'rats, wanted to wager me he'd have 50, "cause 'rats move about more on rainy nights." I passed the bet up, feeling the odds were all with Cal, it having been my experience that a larger than usual catch follows a rainy night.

The first trap we came to was sprung—with nothing but a bunch of grass in it. The second was sprung. So were the fourth and fifth. The sixth, as I remember, held a 'rat, then there was a long trip before we got another. Almost every other trap was thrown; at least one out of three.

"What in ——, have you gone an' hoodooed me? Darn yer hide, I believe ye hav'. I never had sech punk luck."

Cal, I noticed, was considerably peeved at the way matters were going. The more empty traps he found, the higher his wrath soared, until finally he was not merely chagrined, but "cussing" mad. With 'rat pelts selling at \$1.80, plus 15 cents for the carcass, it is indeed a disappointment to lose a few dozen. Cal got down on his knees in the water and closely examined the sets and trap for evidence. Except for grass cuttings, etc., that had caught in the traps, there was nothing to show for them being sprung—no feet or hairs.

"By gol, I'm a hoodooed sun-of-a-gun," exclaimed Cal,

thoroughly disgusted. We went over his lines of over 100 traps and only got a total of seven 'rats out of about 40 sprung.

I didn't attempt any kidding about the bet, knowing Cal's feelings in the matter. We plodded back to the house without carrying on a conversation. Evidently Cal was trying to figure out the mystery of so many sprung traps with nothing in them.

Many trappers in this section use old style, low jaw traps and experience a large percentage of pull-outs—in many cases as many feet as 'rats. Cal used a lot of common No. 1 traps as well as some others, but as large a percentage of the latter were sprung as the former without even any feet in them.

We had each advanced several theories concerning the sprung traps, and at last decided the rain had fallen with enough force to trip the pans.

Arriving back at the house, we were much interested to know what Sam had taken. He had skipped part of his line, owing to high water. His gunny sack was nearly half full of 'rats and Cal and I looked at each other like a couple of dubs. Then we spilled the news to Sam, much more experienced in tricks of the marsh, explaining everything in detail.

"Yeah, I had that to happen to me once and I lost sleep at nights trying to figure out how they'd get throwed. Now, I'll tell ye, most of the 'rats I got to-day were caught at bank burrows an' sech places—few in runways. Most of your marsh is suitable only for lead sets, eh? Well, the rain beat down so hard last night hit draws a lot of debris to the top of the water, especially in the leads."

"That's right," says Cal, "little fine stuff, as though it works up out of the muck—just like the material of an old 'rat hut."

"As I said," continues Sam, "this debris collects on the top of the water an' Mr. Muskrat comes along trying to swim instead of walking, see? This stuff gathers up in front of the 'rat's body, which hit pushes ahead. So ye see how this trash throws the trap before the 'rat reaches it."

Cal and I agreed Sam had the right "dope."

### Chapter III

The day after the heavy rain storm that spoiled our luck, springing most of the traps with drift debris, we started in "moving up" the traps—as they say in that section. Most successful marsh 'ratters move their traps every day, that is, those that catch 'rats. A trap that doesn't catch anything the first night set may be left three or four nights, at the end of which time it will be moved if unproductive. Each trapper has his own peculiar ideas as to how often traps should be moved to new locations. Cal believed in moving about half of his traps each day, thus a trap occupied one position only two nights in succession.

After a lunch at the house, Cal and I started out with gunny sacks and walking canes, prepared for a half day on the marsh. A half day of wading through the deep muck and water, constantly tangling his feet up with the marsh grass, is enough to tire out the hardest trapper, especially if he has been carrying a load of 'rats or traps.

We had left the traps sprung that morning, intending to come back in the afternoon, so we knew just which traps to move and which to leave set. Our method was to pull the flag sticks, jab them into the traps, if open, or snap the traps onto the ends. Thus we could carry a large number of traps over the shoulders; perhaps from a distance they had the appearance of a peddler's pack on the end of a stick. In this manner, the traps do not get tangled together.

By working hard we got 70 traps moved and set in dandy locations. The 'rats had been stirring about just after the heavy rain, and there was an abundance of fresh signs to aid us in making sets in favorable locations. Newly made grass cuttings on little knolls were the most common indications of 'rat activity, but we could usually tell if the lead had been recently used. While we didn't set traps on any of the houses, if one looked as if it might be occupied, we placed traps far enough away to make sure catches with an assurance of a higher percentage of males than females.

When the last trap was reset we beat it to the nearest dry 'rat house and thereon perched for a rest and smoke. The tops of the houses are usually dry and afford the only spots

a trapper can sit on in the marsh. After a couple of months' marsh trapping, I got so I could rest standing in the water, first on one foot, then on the other, as do the cranes and old marsh trappers.

After we had our briars filled and burning, I ventured to remark we'd have to make a carry out the next day, before we could finish the lines.

"Yep, we oughter, but I don't like the way the wind has been blowing all day. It's coming from the east, an' thet means a storm, and high tide. Didn't ye notice the cranes and geese flying high and acting funny to-day? Wal, I think we can bank on more rain." Then Cal set in to condemn the unusual weather in no uncertain terms, and I smoked on in silence.

The wind increased and black clouds made their appearance over the horizon in a remarkably short time, so we climbed off the 'rat house and hastily beat it for the nearest dry land, a half mile distant. From there we had three miles of road walking to reach the house.

A high east wind prevailed all that night and just about daylight the next morning it began to fairly rain in bucketfuls. The wind had blown so hard we didn't expect anything in our traps, so didn't venture out. The day was spent around the old fireplace, popping pop corn, smoking and reciting tales. We had a big muskrat roast for dinner and ate so much we could with difficulty move from our chairs. The table sat close to the wall on one side, and into this narrow place I was stationed because I happened to be the thinnest—before eating anyway. So when I ate till my belt had been let out three notches and my stomach touched the edge of the table, I knew enough to stop before becoming wedged in, which would have put me in an awkward plight as a guest.

The following day there was an unusually high tide, higher than Sam and Cal had ever seen in their 12 years' residence on the Wicomico. The water was backed over the marshes deeper than hip rubber boots. In some places the State roads were covered so that the daily mail ceased to come and we were cut off from the outer world, as it were. After a week of such living in an unsettled country, we could easily imagine ourselves in Robinson Crusoe's plight. In fact, we didn't know

whether the World War had ended or whether the United States was still in it. I sat by the fire and re-read Robinson Crusoe and Dante's "Two Years Before the Mast" and enjoyed them as much as if I had never read them numerous times before.

Trapping was entirely out of the question, and this status of affairs didn't set very well with the trappers since each day of trapping meant many dollars lost and a day nearer the end of the season. When a fellow has planked down a hundred bones for trapping rights to a piece of marsh, he generally calculates to make every day count. Most of them want the pelts, and will get them in any old way. So I wasn't surprised to hear Sam and Cal planning a shooting trip.

Perhaps they wouldn't have put their plans into action, as they were a little leary of me, being practically a "stranger within the gates," but the second night of the high water we saw a light moving along through the marsh and soon heard the boom of guns. Gradually the lights increased until there were a half dozen and guns spoke as rapidly as artillery fire. I noticed the two trappers had eagerly watched the lights moving over the marsh, and they were becoming uneasy and impatient to get out into the battle.

"Wal, ar' we goin' to set here an' let 'em shoot up our marsh?" Sam questioned at length, with a menacing gleam of his eye. One of the lights had now crossed over on Sam's marsh, and I knew it was a challenge that would be instantly and stoutly refuted.

At Sam's question Cal looked askance at me. "Yes, boys, I'm with you; when in Rome you do as the Romans do; if you fellows don't get out and hold your marsh, looks like the other shooters will do it for you."

With my expressed willingness to accompany them, the trappers immediately prepared to start on the marsh. I was out to learn the marsh 'ratter's life and didn't feel like passing up something just because it bid fair to hold a little excitement, and perhaps an element of danger. Also I considered it wasn't lawful to shoot 'rats, but I did not have a gun or expect to participate in the affair, and considered I had no right to dictate to other trappers—especially when they couldn't be

blamed for protecting their own interests. If the lawmakers would enforce the laws so that the law observers wouldn't be imposed on by lawbreakers, conditions generally would be vastly improved. Perhaps at the present time such is the case. At the time of which I write, from the description Sam and Cal gave me of the "shooters" and their outlawish methods, I couldn't blame them for going against them with their own medicine.

The trappers filled their pockets with 12-gauge shells, examined their guns and got out an old "jack light" similar to those used by poachers, and deer hunters. Then we started for the boat and a wild night on the marsh.

The boat was a sort of skiff affair, such as I had years before became proficient in handling. So I took the seat in the stern with a paddle, Sam sat in the middle of the boat and Cal in the bow with a gun across his knees. We bore off down the river for several hundred yards, patrolling along the bank trying to locate a light on Sam's marsh. Cal and I paddled as quietly as possible so the poachers wouldn't be warned of our coming and extinguish their light.

We turned into a creek and paddled up its winding course. Shots began to ring out into the night air ahead of us, and we knew the poachers were on the same creek, so it was a matter of overtaking them. Many muskrats were swimming around, but the gunners didn't dare shoot. We paddled quietly with all haste possible around an endless number of bends, penetrating farther and farther into the marsh and fast approaching the poaching gunners.

"See that point ahead?" Sam whispered over his shoulder.

"I see it," I replied.

"Wal, you just let me out thar, then paddle like h—— on up the creek an' when you hear a double shot ye'll know I beat ye to 'em."

Sam had a well-worn trail leading into the marsh from the point and he started over it at break-neck speed. I have seen darker nights, but that one in particular was darker than any I want to see when in the marsh. However, I presume Sam was able to follow the trail by the sense of feeling, and instinct, for he certainly couldn't see.

It wasn't hard for me to guess his plan, which was to get the drop on the fellows from the high marsh grass, where he couldn't be seen, yet could see the poachers. I feared an ambush; in fact, was beginning to think I had better have stayed in the house and read *Crusoe*. Cal never said a word, but paddled as though for wages. After what seemed hours to me, during which time guns were continually booming and 'rats diving into the water off the banks ahead of us (which must have been a great temptation to Cal to shoot) we got within hearing of boisterous talking.

"The Laney's, by gol," exclaimed Cal, in a low voice, "an' I can tell they're all likkered up. The steamboat from Baltimore came down last night and 'em d—— Laney's alus has a gallon or so of likker coming on hit."

I asked about Sam's safety, and the look Cal gave me out of the corner of his eye, as well as I could tell in the dark, was answer enough.

"Sam hain't been frogging around on this here marsh a dozen years without knowing how to take care of his hide. I wouldn't put it past the Laney's to plunk him one if they got the chance. Thet Thorp Laney has swore to shoot him next time he meets him on the marsh, but Thorp was pretty drunk then."

We had now reached the point where every word the poachers uttered was understandable. We could even hear their paddles hitting the boat sides and splashing in the water.

"Hey, Tim, you son-of-a-gun, looka quick, dammit look, thar's a whole family on thet house. Shoot quick!" Boom! Boom! Boom! the guns roared in the night air.

Again we heard their loud yelling, "Got eight of 'em that round. How's that? Wouldn't old Sam like this, though! Think I'll go up and invite him down to help us tote his 'rats. Guess he's setting up at the house cussing the lights; he wouldn't dare come down here—if he did, I'd waller him in the muck, then make him peel our 'rats."

"You're a d—— liar," Sam's voice sounded like he was ready to back up his statement.

The boat load of gunners was just a short distance ahead, and about the time we heard Sam's voice, a bend was turned

that enabled us to see them. Since we didn't have any light, they, of course, couldn't see us. Immediately after Sam's challenge, a double rang out and the light in the boat disappeared. Then of all the cussing and yelling and calling of names I have never since heard. But another shot from Sam's trusty gun put the kibosh on their yelling. The echo came back and was only mingled with the cries of night birds, frogs and insects. The gunners realized that to speak meant to give away their location and a shot might follow in their direction. Sam's double had floundered them in the creek and their only alternative was to swim ashore to the opposite bank and beat it through the marsh. Sam kept yelling threats to them from his hidden retreat, telling them they would be shot on sight if they should attempt to "hang around." Then he called to Cal, "Bring on the men—and, sheriff, keep an eye out on the left bank." I caught the idea and asked in a deep, concerned voice if he had the drop on them.

"Hold them till I get there, then we'll count up the 'rats and see how much they'll have to pay down to Salisbury court to-morrow," I yelled. By the time Cal and I had cautiously paddled up to the scene of the encounter, we could only hear the distant splashes in the marsh, as if made by men in more or less haste.

We didn't dare make a light, however, until Cal had scouted around in the dark on the left bank and came back to report no one lying in ambush. Then we threw the "spotlight" on a boat filled to the brim with water and muskrats. The 'rats had floated up to the top of the water and were a black mass. We caught others floating down the creek; picked up some lodged along the banks. The shot had torn a hole in the bottom of the boat big enough to stick a 'rat through.

"Ah, to the victors belong the spoils," exclaimed Sam, much elated at the sight that greeted his eyes.

We found 40 some 'rats in the boat and half as many more in the creek. Then Sam took his belt axe and chopped the boat into 'rat bed material, and we proceeded down the creek toward the Wicomico—without a light.

"Wal, I was goin' to run the gang off and do some shootin' myself, but I think we've got enough as it is, eh? All I'll



want to skin to-morrow," and Sam chuckled to himself and plied the paddle vigorously. The moon was hidden, so we could navigate up the river in absolute safety, so far as ambushing was concerned, and since the other shooters were on their own marshes, we agreed to call it a night's work.

### Chapter IV

The big tide that had practically stopped trapping and put illegal shooting on the map, gradually subsided and then we had a week's job moving all the traps up. In spite of the close watching, some marshes had been pretty badly "shot up," ours included, so we were slow putting the traps in working order to give the 'rats a rest. Sam and Cal had caught about 1,400 'rats on their marshes, and having them permanent, they didn't want to catch many more for the reason it would deplete the next season's crop. So when the opportunity popped up to rent a 300-acre marsh farther up Wico creek, Sam and I decided to take it for the next month's trapping. Sam owned his own marsh, so, of course, didn't care whether he got another 'rat on it.

Sam and I drove up one Saturday to prospect the marsh and found it as represented by the owner. Undoubtedly it was the best marsh for trapping in the country. The owner was a Northerner who didn't trap or allow poaching and the 'rats had had three years of rest. Being quite a ways up the creek, the tide didn't hinder the trapping so much as it does some of the river marsh. The grass had grown up in the old trappers' trails, making it rather difficult to break into. I don't think there is a Mississippi cane brake or African jungle any harder to penetrate; or easier in which to get turned around and forget the points of the compass. The natives of this section never saw a compass in use trapping, so I got ragged some for taking one along after the first day, same as I used in the Adirondack woods. Take it in six- to eight-foot grass with no high points for observation, and any experienced trapper is apt to go in circles. The high grass also hides the "flags," so it is an easy matter to lose traps until well defined trails are formed.

Sam started in at the upper end of the marsh and I at the lower end to meet somewhere near the middle. At an hour of sundown I hadn't seen or heard anything of Sam and began to look for a way out of the marsh. I had followed a lead in its devious route, and soon found myself back near the starting point. Again plunging into the marsh, I became absorbed in following up leads and nearly lost track of the time. I must have made a couple of circles, at least, certainly traveled in any direction but a straight line.

This particular marsh didn't contain a large number of muskrat houses in proportion to its area, but the 'rats were certainly there in thousands. I believe many of them were living in burrows on the woods' side of the marsh. The marsh lay parallel with a woodland and creek, 100 yards or so wide, and the dry land extended abruptly from the wet, entirely to the liking of bank burrowing 'rats. Just as many solitary beavers leave the ponds for bank burrows, I think a large percentage of the 'rats on this marsh had done likewise. The number of houses, of course, had determined the renting price, so we were agreeably surprised to find signs indicative of more 'rats than would be suggested by the number of houses.

There were many spring holes in this marsh, as I discovered by stepping into one of the bottomless quagmires. It was only by the aid of tall grass that I could get out, and enough of the grass was broken down to permanently mark the spot. The spring branches cut deep some places, affording banks for the 'rats to burrow from. It was an ideal, naturally ditched marsh, thus making for an abundance of 'rats. You understand the muskrat doesn't dig straight down, so a marsh that hasn't any ditches in it is pretty apt to be scarce of 'rats. Ditch digging nearly always improves a marsh as proved by one successful muskrat farmer. The muskrat must have a bank to start from, usually beginning under water and extending upward and inland just beneath the surface of the firm ground for several yards. At the head of these leads the 'rats are caught, though they can be caught at the entrance if it is possible to set a trap. Usually the entrance cannot be reached or there will not be enough of firm bottom to support a trap.

Along one particularly large branch, almost a small creek,

I saw a mink trail and several 'coon tracks. So I followed the branch down to its outlet into the Wico creek, back-tracking the mink trail. There I expected to find a good location for a mink set at the point, and wasn't disappointed; in fact, I found more in the way of fresh otter signs. Here was a nice point at the mouth of the creek for the mink set, and nearby a better prospect to get Mr. Otter. He had come up through a large muskrat lead and left the refuse of a meal on the bank. I gently backed away, mentally drawing a picture of that otter hide stretched on a board.

Muskrat tracks were as thick as snowflakes along the edge of the water and all the leads showed signs of frequent use. During the day I nearly stepped on a 'rat more than once, hidden in the thick undergrass, and saw many of them swimming in the water.

I finally got out of the marsh and met Sam at the buggy, where he had been waiting a half hour. He was highly elated at the excellent prospects, and on the way back we formulated our plans for the next week. I was to trap the lower end and Sam the upper end.

Setting out traps in the marsh is so darn near like work that I get tired of it. You start in the morning as early as possible to get on the marsh with a gunny sack full of traps and a back load of stakes. The stakes are short and are pushed down underneath the water in making a set. In addition to the stakes we must have a "flag pole" for every set, a tall switch with a rag tied to the end or an evergreen branch for short grass. In some marshes not trapped persistently, it is possible to use a long stake for both trap fastening and flag; but the 'rats soon get "educated" to the stakes and steer clear of them. The flag switches should be stuck into the ground about six feet away from the set, but inclined in its direction.

When the incoming tide drove us out of the marsh, Sam had placed about 60 traps, while I only had three dozen set. We both were covered with black mud from foot to head. So just before reaching the house, we stopped at a stream and took a bath with clothes on, considering the mud less desirable than water.

My note book shows the next day's catch to be 19 and 34 'rats, respectively, a good catch for the number of traps out. I moved up about a dozen traps and set that many more; also, considerably damaged a vulture that I caught in the act of robbing a trap. On this marsh we lost an average of two 'rats a day on account of these birds. This high percentage happened owing to a lot of the marsh not being covered with tide water. If the 'rats are drowned the chances are they will not be noticed, but a struggling 'rat has a small chance out in the open.

Now we settled down to steady trapping, day in and day out, not exciting but profitable, anyway. 'Rats at that time were holding up in value pretty well and it was a poor day when we caught less than two dozen 'rats, and usually we got nearer twice that number. The best day, I believe, was 76 'rats, secured after a foggy, wet night. Of course, most of our traps had been moved up the previous day. This necessity always kept the game from growing monotonous; it also kept us busy looking up new locations. Usually a trap should be moved when a muskrat is caught, but after the spot has had a rest of several days, a trap can be set back. The successful marsh trapper is moving his traps continually. We never bothered with scents or baits, but depended entirely on our knowledge of muskrat habits, time tested methods and the careful setting of traps.

A few mornings we made poor catches owing to unusual weather conditions. For instance, we had another all-night rain that seemed to spring the traps, and another time we got only about six 'rats each. These occurrences were so rare, however, that they were almost welcomed, since it gave us a rest. It is some job to skin 50 'rats every night after a hard day on the marsh; and stretch them on boards in the morning while the tide is leaving the marsh.

We had become tired of so many oyster and "marsh hare" feeds, so one day toward the end of the season, when the 'rats were coming in slowly, Sam, Cal and I took a day off the trap lines to go fishing. We used a sort of seine net, the like of which I never saw elsewhere. The net is in the shape of a half moon, and it is manipulated from a boat by means of a

long handle, requiring one man's attention. Another man allows the boat to drift down stream. The net forms a bag that will hold quite a number of fish. There is some quick action when the fisherman feels a "big one" bump into the net.

It couldn't have been said the fishing was good, owing to the water being too clear, but we got enough fish to have a few feeds. I had a little sport with sunnies in a creek slough, securing some that would weigh nearly a pound and excellent for eating purposes. Near the house was a creek that emptied into Wicomico river and afforded excellent bullhead fishing at the junction.

Our 'rat catch was gradually dwindling down, indicative that we had secured the cream of the marsh. After two weeks of close trapping, our average combined catch amounted to about two dozen 'rats. However, we had secured several hundred of the little water animals and were well satisfied. Sam liked the marsh well enough to lease it for a term of five years, so, as he explained, "I will have something to fall back on when I want to give my marsh a rest."

The report had gotten out that the Mannings had made a clean-up on 'rats, and in consequence it became a daily matter to entertain and be entertained by sundry types of local fur buyers. Their calls became a nuisance, and I insisted on hanging a sign up "not at home." Fur buyers have a habit of coming around early in the morning about the time you start to board and stretch the previous day's catch, and when you decline their offer or state your intention to hold your furs a little longer, they fail to "get you." Some of them are like good insurance agents when it comes to a nice line of gab.

Local buyers' quotations for 'rats had been holding up well in price until we became interested in selling, then they suddenly took a 20 per cent. drop. Fur buyers changed their attitude from optimism to a down-in-the-mouth tale about the bottom having dropped out of the market. Our lot included about 800 'rats belonging to Sam and I and 500 more owned by Cal. The catch previous to this had been sold. The buyers almost convinced Sam and Cal to sell immediately to insure against a further decline in the market; but I never sell low. This I tried to beat into their heads: That it is all right to

buy low, but hold for high prices, even if you lose the lot. That has always been my policy. They agreed to hold up a week or so, anyway, and in the meantime I took a little jaunt over into Dorchester to see how local buyers there were living. Surprisingly, I found that they had not yet got onto the "drop" in the market.

Well, the local buyers of Wicomico are leagued together pretty well to tell the same tale and not let the cat out of the bag by some one whispering a "little better than the other fellow" offer, thought I, and I dropped a wire to the big fur market for quotations on 1,500 'rats. The offer I received was less than that of a Dorchester buyer's price, who was about to fall down on a large contract with a manufacturer and was giving away his profit. So we sold to a home State dealer without getting "skinned." The trapper does a lot of skinning to get skinned himself so often.

Sam and Cal still kept a few traps set, but were not operating in a business way. Most of the traps were now tended only every other day.

I now had quite a wad of kale in my jeans and was the popular guy at all the dances in a nearby village. I came very near investing in a gas wagon just to show one particular native a real life, but always by some instinct of better judgment just about the time I begin to "fall" for some inducement to leave the trap line, I suddenly decide to move on to new pastures. So I surprised Sam and Cal one morning by packing my duffle bag and stating the intention to leave.

"Where to now?" Cal asked.

"Think I've just got enough coin to carry me to old Michigan and buy a grubstake for a bear hunt with Curley the Trapper," I replied.

"Why, ye can't afford to go away from Maryland without visiting the Kinney brothers. They're the most famous trappers on the Wicomico. They catch a thousand 'rats where we catch a hundred. They get a lot of otters too. Take the Wicomico boat to Jim's wharf."

So I visited the Kinney brothers and thereby missed the bear hunt in Michigan; but for all that, after the season had closed in Maryland, I got back into old New York State in

time to help pard E. J. Dailey clean up a nice bunch of 'rats in St. Lawrence county.

Sam caught the otter that was living in our marsh; but didn't have anything on the writer by so doing, as I got a mink and two 'coons—the latter made fine roasts.

## Chapter V

It was a beautiful, sunshiny day, typical of Maryland, when I stepped aboard the boat Wicomico on its way to Whitehaven. The Manning boys seemed real peeved that I was leaving, which was some contrast to the welcome I first got. I promised to whittle them each a watch "charm" out of a buck's horn and send them after I got back to the North, and waved good-bye as the boat chugged off down the river.

It was only a few reaches and turns down the river to Jim Kinney's wharf, so that I had no more than smoked a stogie when I had to gather my traps and jump. A couple of bags were thrown after me and the boat sailed along without entirely stopping. Had the captain not been an hour late, he would have stopped for a chat; anyway that's the only thing I saw done in a hurry while in the State.

An elderly "cullered gentleman" came hobbling down to the wharf on the pretense of expecting mail off the boat, but I am of the opinion he had a little personal curiosity to satisfy.

"Yes, suh, boss, you'll find Mister Kinney's house right down thataway, no more'n a whoop an' holler frum here," the shade of Africa informed me.

As compensation, I extracted from my flannel shirt pocket a Pittsburgh (it might have originated at Baltimore) stogie, the sight of which nearly knocked the old fellow down.

"Thankee, suh, thankee, thank'e," and I left him bowing on the wharf. I am wondering yet if his aged constitution stood the test of that rank weed! It's a sin to treat anybody that way except tough "sourdough" trappers.

I arrived at Jim's house just as he was coming off the trap line. Across his back was a gunny sack full of 'rats and in his hand a sullen 'possum. We ate the 'possum for supper and with baked sweet potatoes it wasn't hard to take. Jim greeted

me about as any one would a supernatural person who had just dropped out of the sky before their eyes; but as time wore on and he observed I was as plain and practical as I looked, he warmed up to real Southern hospitality. The good wife did me a great injury by cooking too much, for when I had to leave and settle back to "war rations" it went a little hard. I never feasted more at an Alabama barbecue than at Jim's house. Hospitality I might mention as their only fault.

Well, I found out that reports were right concerning the Kinney brothers' catches. They had, of course, seen the best part of the season go by, but at that were still carrying their day's catch in a sack. Without a doubt the Kinney brothers are the best trappers on the Wicomico and it must be remembered that is the best trapping section in the country. Jim works the marsh by instinct, seemingly, and moves his traps up each day, invariably placing them right where the 'rat is going to travel. If it's not the instinct of long experience that tells a man to move his trap six feet over, then it takes a lot of mathematics to figure out from a one-way trail just where the next one will be. This Jim does with inevitable results.

Some say Jim goes out on the marshes in the evening and communicates with the muskrats, being able to understand their own language. Others say he charms them and on command they march right into his open traps. I wouldn't doubt any reasonable assertion after seeing him come in with a sack half full of 'rats and his brother empty-handed. Ed is no dub of a trapper; in fact, I would place him above the average experienced marsh trapper; but he doesn't have the uncanny "luck" of Jim. Jim gets 'em whether the trapping is good or not. His brother's marsh lies adjoining, but the 'rats flock to Jim's marsh; I wouldn't pay rent on a marsh close to one trapped by Jim Kinney. No, he doesn't use any sort of scent dope—this stuff is an unknown quantity to the marsh trapper. Jim's success couldn't well be called plain trapper's luck—it happened too frequently. Perhaps there is some deep science connected with the art that we average run trappers haven't yet acquired.





**A Rat Catch at the Top of a Lead Which Extends to the  
Creek Bed**

The Kinney brothers both own and lease marsh land, so that in season they are kept busy tending their traps and skinning 'rats. When the season is over, they perhaps could well afford to "sport around" until the next season, but they do not. They operate a large farm, do some fishing in the Wicomico river and otherwise employ themselves at remunerative work. They, of course, are not foot-loose and care-free as is the average trapper of the North.

Some years the trapping isn't so good as other seasons, but an average catch for Jim is 1,000 'rats—that's 500 a month. No, he doesn't even take time to sit down on a 'rat house to roll a smoke. The minute the tide subsides, it finds Jim sitting on the bank in readiness and he plunges in and remains on his feet in the marsh until driven off by the incoming tide. When a load of 'rats are secured, he catches them and by night may have a half-dozen caches to pick up—in which case he staggers under the load to the road and waits for a ride home to come along.

The first day Jim put me through the mill. We made dozens of circles around over a half-dozen marshes. The day was sultry hot. There was water everywhere, but not a drop fit to drink. There was land under our feet, but water over it, so that we could not sit down to rest. If we stopped, we had to stand, first on one foot, then on the other, in the manner of a stork. You dry-land lubbers can imagine what a day of this is, pulling heavy boots through two feet of slimy water and muck and under a 50-pound load. If the weather is windy, maybe we can find a dry spot on top of a 'rat house and pause long enough to fill our pipes.

We went over a marsh that the tide didn't affect and got a nice bunch of brown 'rats. The going is much better in a marsh where the tide doesn't reach, not being so muddy. So we soon got over the straight line of about 50 traps, up to the neck of another small marsh. Here we crossed the neck and cached the 'rats, 21, I believe, and started in on the new circle of traps.

"Now, here's where I get black 'rats," Jim informed me; "it's funny there ain't any out in the big marsh, but they run half black here."

This marsh was small but full of deep holes, many of them five or six feet deep and innocent looking. After sliding into one of them, I kept dogging Jim's tracks. We got five 'rats out of about 15 traps here, and three of them were black. Since blacks were worth no more than browns last season, there wasn't any speculation in getting them.

Past these two marshes, Jim had a hike of a mile or two

to the big marsh. It took nearly half a day to get over this one, if we didn't spend too much time setting up traps. There were several circles of trap lines in this marsh belonging to Jim, and a negro trapper handled one end of the marsh. All around the edges school kids and small trappers dabbled in, setting a cheap trap here and there, not doing much damage to 'rats or trapper. Occasionally some one stole a 'rat on Jim, but they were wise enough not to get caught in the act. Jim had once shot a hole in a man's boat, sinking him in the river, for trying to get away with a bunch of 'rats. So his reputa-



**Examining "Signs" About a Muskrat House**

tion for straight business dealings was pretty good insurance on his trapped 'rats.

When we got over the big marsh, each of us had a load of 'rats. Tired and hungry and wet—an' four miles from home with a cache of 26 'rats to pick up on the way! When we ran plumb into an old farmer driving a buckboard on the country road, each felt like hugging him or holding him up—anything for a ride. But after a supper of baked muskrat and yams, oysters and many other good things, we felt like our real selves again.

We talked about hunting, fishing, trapping and everything else of interest to trappers, but our discussions usually drifted to traps and trapping. The Kinney boys were interested in traps in particular, because they lost a lot of 'rats out of ordinary No. 1 traps they had been accustomed to using.

"I'll say, Dick, when these hard trapped 'rats shy of a marker pole, you have got to have a trap that is easy to hide; also one that can be placed in a narrow runway. When I get a trap that'll do this and catch high up on the leg without breaking the bone, the other fellow is welcome to all the 'rats that get away. Their hides wouldn't make him a fur cap."



# EXPERIENCES OF AN AMATEUR TRAPPER IN ARIZONA

By Walter Winsor

FOR some years I had been intending to take advantage of the first opportunity that presented to explore the Mongollon Mountains in northern and eastern Arizona. I had lived a short time and hunted some in those mountains, but it is a big country and I had seen only a small part of it.

Early last spring, finding myself foot-loose and being the possessor of a horse and saddle, I hit the trail from Phoenix to Payson. Payson is some 20 miles south of the rim of the mountains; just a little mountain country town containing two general merchandise stores, two boarding houses, a combination skating rink and dance hall, garage, and a few residences, where cowboys, cattlemen and ranchers get supplies, surrounded by rolling hills covered with timber and during the summer a fine climate.

I worked around Payson during the spring and summer, driving a four-horse team across the mountains to Winslow and back for a cattleman, which enabled me to see and learn quite a little about a section of the country I had never before visited. The Mongollon Mountains are what might be termed a high mesa country, or table-land, reaching from northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona, clear into New Mexico, and averaging, I should say, some 40 or 50 miles wide, and heavily timbered. The altitude of the top of the mountains is 7,000 to 8,000 feet and is a lovely country in the summer, but quite cold in the winter and very often covered with deep snow.

When fall came I wanted to go on a trapping expedition, but never having seen a trap set in my life, had decided to throw in with some old trapper if I could find one willing to take me in. I had been warned against going in with a certain trapper on the mountain, being told he was too disagreeable for anyone to get along with at all.

During the summer I had been given a white-faced hound bitch and two of her pups from a good hound. And it so hap-

pened that the trapper I had been warned against had bought a white-faced hound bitch a year previous and some one had told him I had his dog. One day the latter part of last August a man rode up to my camp on a horse and said: "My name is K——. I have rode 500 miles looking for a bald-faced hound bitch, the best dog I ever owned or ever saw." "Is that your dog?" I asked, pointing to where my dog was tied. "No, that's not my dog. My dog, Sappho, would have been making a big fuss by the time I got to the barn," he said, without looking around. "I knew Sappho wasn't here when I got to the barn."

I asked him how he happened to lose his dog. "I was crossing Clear Creek and had camped down in the bottom of the canyon. Sappho and Dan (Dan was only a pup then) treed a lion up in the cliffs above the creek and the lion finally got high up where the dogs couldn't get to him. Dan watched below and Sappho went up the creek looking for a place to get on top. In a few minutes she came back and went down the creek and was gone about a half hour when she came back and went up the creek again and got on top somewhere and went to the lion. Then Dan went up the creek and got on top. Then I rode up the creek and worked my way on top, but never succeeded in getting to where the dogs and lion were and got back to camp about four o'clock. Dan got back to camp about dark, but Sappho never did get back. I pulled out the next morning, thinking she would follow up, but after awhile I decided the lion must have killed her. But several months later a reliable man told me that he saw Sappho at a cattle round-up and I have been hunting for her since."

His name was Billy K——. He had ridden from Buck Springs on the run. I invited him to stay over night and he stayed. He said he was just traveling around in the mountains to save funeral expenses; that he had come to Arizona from Nevada some years previous almost dead with what he supposed was "miner's con"; that his health had greatly improved and that he now believed he never had anything but asthma and catarrh.

After supper he proposed that I go trapping for the winter with him; that he had seven burros, pack saddles, two saddle

horses, plenty of traps and everything needed, but was not strong enough to pack and run a trap line alone. I told him I had hunted some, but knew nothing whatever about trapping.

"That makes no difference, if you follow my directions you will soon learn all about it," he said.

That sounded all right and I decided to take a chance and Billy was delighted. Taking everything into consideration, I was a little afraid of the proposition, but it gave me a chance to learn something about trapping.

He asked me if I was cranky and said he had had about 25 different partners and never got along with any of them, and they all said he was a crank, but that he didn't think he was a crank; that they always tried to tell him where to head in, or else get mad and broke up something, then he cussed them out and they left.

I must get up to his camp at Buck Spring soon as possible, as we had to go down on Leonard Creek and catch fish to make bait and had to kill meat to make jerky to take along on our trip south, etc.

Accordingly, on the first of September, I rode up to Buck Springs, taking my dogs along, and stayed there some three or four days before coming back to Payson after provisions, Billy saying that there was plenty of time.

Buck Springs is a beautiful spot on top of the mountains four miles back from the rim on Buck Springs Creek. There is nothing there but a ranger station and that is only occupied during the fire season.

About the time I went up there a bear came into a sheep camp near there one night and killed several sheep. There is a fair number of black-tailed deer around there, but they have been thinned out in the last few years. But turkeys are plentiful. In riding two or three miles along Buck Springs Creek I would often pass four or five flocks of turkey. One day when I was afoot I saw a flock feeding in my direction and before they saw me I got on my knees and remained perfectly still and they came up close around me. When I raised up they looked at me a little surprised and trotted slowly off in the timber. But, believe me, when the hunting season opens they trot faster and are about the hardest thing there is to hit

on the run with a rifle. In nearly all the canyons around there you can find beaver, and elk are quite numerous, but both are protected. There was talk of issuing a certain number of licenses to kill elk last fall, but it never went through, and it was a very good thing that it did not, for the elk especially.

I had forgotten the name of the man I had been warned against going in with and had been with Billy a month before I knew he was the same man.

After a few days I took three burros and went to Payson after supplies and was gone, I think, five days. Billy was awfully pleased when I returned; said it was the longest five days he ever put in in his life, and he wished that I had been there the day before. A big buck elk had walked along the ridge above camp in plain sight and made a thorough inspection of the place, so Billy said, and stayed close around about 20 minutes, stepping along so gracefully and springy with his wide-branching horns.

"Now, the first thing, is to kill some meat and make jerky," Billy said. Billy had a .32 Winchester self-loader, but was out of cartridges. I have a .30-30 Marlin.

The next afternoon (it had rained in the forenoon) I went out afoot and killed a large buck about two miles from camp. He was coming in my direction through a little park when I looked through some small pine trees between me and the park and saw him. He must have had a glimpse of me and didn't know what I was, because he stopped and looked in my direction. I got down behind a log, thinking he would come closer. He looked a while and took a few more steps, looked again and took another step or two and stamped his foot. Realizing that he was liable to turn and run, I pulled the trigger and got him through the heart.

It was almost dark when I arrived at camp with the liver, and Billy shook my hand, slapped me on the back and said the battle had been won.

A few days later a Mexican cowboy rode up and tied his horse to the fence and ate dinner with us.

We took a ride in the afternoon and the boy stayed all night with us. The next morning he was very anxious that I go home with him and he would take me out in the after-



noon and show me a nice buck. I went home with him and after dinner we started out and he showed me a buck alright. He didn't have it tied down either, it was running loose in the woods. After firing one shot that buck was tame enough and it was an easy matter to put him on a pack animal and bring him to camp. I had brought a pack animal from camp for that purpose. You see I was getting a supply of jerky for the winter's trapping trip. We got one more deer after that and eight turkeys altogether, and then quit. We could have killed any number of either deer or turkey, but we only got enough venison to make a small supply of jerky and now and then when we needed it we had fried turkey. Nearly every day I rode past flock after flock of turkey without removing my rifle from its scabbard, but on one occasion, after passing several bunches, I came upon a large bunch close to camp and fired four shots, killing a turkey with the last shot. I thought we were conservative considering that the state game warden was camped a short distance away and people who claim to know say he shot at every cow elk and doe and fawn that showed up. A trapper who is catching varmints that live on game thinks he is justified in getting a little meat in or out of season.

Some time in September we put out about ten traps. Billy always carries a canvas bag on the horn of his saddle with about three kinds of bait in it, a prospector's pick to dig the hole for the traps, and a lard bucket cover punched full of holes to sift the dirt to cover the trap. We caught two skunks, a coyote and three turkeys. The fur was not very good yet. When you catch a turkey in a trap he commences to call and some varmint usually comes and gets him before you do. However, this spring I caught a turkey and beat all the other varmints to it, but we didn't have any cranberries to go with it.

We had been over the trap line one day and on our way back to camp we suddenly heard a fusilade of shots that sounded more like a battle than anything else. We kept on down the trail until we caught up with four hunters from Payson and Globe with a pack outfit. One man had killed a turkey and a man was in the act of picking it up as we rode up, but when he saw us, he threw it aside. After he saw that we

were not rangers he went back and got it. It was the day before the hunting season opened.

Along in October, as Billy was getting nervous for fear of getting caught in a snow storm on the mountains, we packed up one day and started for a lower country under the rim, traveling east along an old government road that follows the rim. The first night we camped near a small lake that is the head of Tonto Creek. The next morning it looked like rain and we laid over three days. The first day north of camp I saw a very large buck and the second day I found where a very large band of elk were resting.

We went on down under the rim and camped in Gordon canyon and put out some traps. One day we left the dogs in camp and one of my hound pups got in the jerky and Billy had such a fit about it that I thought it was about time to go; so I bought three burros from Billy and came over here and made arrangements to trap with Louie Pyle.

I had learned a little about trapping and knew the kind of traps I wanted. I got ten No. 4 Newhouse traps from a man by the name of Williams. Louie Pyle had 11 traps, so we started in with 21 traps, and managed to pick up a few more later.

Louie had gone upon the mountains with Babe Haught to help find some bear for Zane Grey and party to shoot, leaving his father and myself here alone. Knowing that Louie knew every trail and old road in the country, I had expected to wait until he returned before setting any traps, so he could help select the best places, but a few coyotes hung around and would sit on some ridge close by every evening and morning and make fun of us until I got mad and told Louie's father I was going to catch some of those coyotes before Louie returned, if they were going to be so smart. But I have since decided they are smarter than I am when it comes to getting caught in a trap.

I set my ten traps along an old trail running through the south part of the pasture, which is only a short distance from another old trail in the same pasture that a band of renegade Apache Indians came through on some 38 years ago and made an attack on the Meadows ranch, killing the old man and one

boy and wounding another boy seven times and scalping him. Soldiers, led by a scout by the name of Tom Hoen, followed the Indians up on the rim and killed nearly all of them, while they were crossing a canyon.

The second night after setting the traps, I caught a gray fox and the second night after that I caught another gray fox. After the fox I caught three or four skunks, and that is all I ever caught on that line.

As near as I can find out there are no red fox in this part of Arizona and it seems strange, because one time in Southern Arizona I killed a red fox myself with a .22 high-power Savage.

After Louie returned we put out another line further south and caught several fox and a few rabbits and blue jays. Then a snow storm came along and we pulled up that line and strung a line north of here and caught a few more fox and some lynx cats, a skunk or two and a turkey.

Then we strung a line through the corn fields, up Ellison creek, mostly for 'coon, and caught five 'coons, a couple foxes and a couple lynx cats. But come to think of it, the dogs caught two of these 'coons and one cat. And so far, there was nothing doing in the coyote line.

Later we strung a line along an old road running west for about six miles. There we put a line on the Dry Dude, another on Bonito creek, one on Pearly creek and one east of Pearly creek.

When we put out a line we usually made three or four catches and that would end it as far as that line was concerned. In past winters Louie had usually caught two or three coyotes around his ranch, but up to the latter part of this winter neither of us had been able to connect up with a coyote. Really it is a hard place to trap coyotes, because, in the first place, only a few of them stay here in the winter; most of them going down lower, where it is warmer, and the few that do stay here don't seem to follow trails. I can set a trap so that it looks as natural where I set the trap as it did before, but I didn't clean my traps to start with and haven't cleaned them very much when making a catch and have not used much or any caution in keeping human scent

away from them. Possibly that is where I fell down. I have read everything I can get hold of about trapping, but trappers advance so many different opinions about scent on traps and everything else pertaining to trapping that after all it seems that experience is the best teacher.

Later on, however, I did manage to catch one coyote. Late one afternoon I rode the line running west from here and found nothing in any of the traps and had ridden back over the same line within about a mile and one-half of camp, when I found a trap gone and it looked as though something had just gotten into it. My horse pricked up his ears and looked down into a thicket and when I looked that way I saw a coyote cutting all kinds of capers trying to get out of the trap. There was a drag on the trap and he was hung up. While I was putting an auxiliary chamber and pistol cartridge in my .30 Marlin, he got the drag loose and went on down the ridge so fast I never did get within sight of him again until I got the dogs. It was nearly sundown and I rode to the ranch about as fast as my horse could travel and got Louie and eight dogs. When we got back to the place Jack, Louie's red hound, who always takes the lead, walked up and smelled where the trap had been, instantly turned and started down the line, but didn't open up until he got to where the coyote first hung up. My black hound pups being inexperienced, opened up almost immediately. But when all the dogs got to where the coyote hung up, the whole band began to play and there was some music. We found them fighting the coyote something over a half mile down the creek and he was an extra large one. We brought him home alive and kept him over night. The fact that I did catch one coyote where there are only a few, even if it was accidental, is some encouragement at least.



# HUNTING AND TRAPPING IN FLORIDA

By Harley Sims

**T**HIRTY below zero puts a tang in the air that causes our minds to revert to warmer climes. While out of the great Northland come interesting tales of the chase, let those who wish, will, and can, go. But for me, the call comes from the Southland, impelling, insistent, and it's me hie away to those cypress swamps, where amid the palmetto and cane brake, we stir up such denizens as the turkey, deer, "skeeters" and jiggers.

The maturing of well laid plans found three of us, my brother King, Walter Smith, of Mansfield, and myself, stowing ourselves and hunting paraphernalia away on the 8 p. m. train at Cincinnati, December 15th. From there we ran through to Atlanta, where we changed from the L. & N. to the A. B. A. railroad for Fitzgerald, arriving there at 6.30 a. m. on the 17th. We were strangers, but I had been in communication with Rev. E. Hollingworth of that place, so we located him and with his aid soon made our arrangements to get out to camp. The Fire Chief kindly let us have the use of his boat, so we hired a wagon, loaded on the boat, piled all our dunnage and before noon were unloading twelve miles from town.

Our camp site was on the bank of the Ocmulgee river, at Red Bluff. We were eighty feet above the river. This stream is navigable to small steamers and of course we must rush out to watch them pass. North of our camp a half mile House creek emptied into the river. At its mouth was quite a lagoon; here we kept our gill net set for scale fish and three set lines for catfish and eels, of which there are plenty.

South of camp was Otter creek, swamps bordered both these streams and opposite the camp along the river was the main swamp he hunted and trapped in. It was about four miles wide and forty miles long, so we had plenty of territory. Our water supply was across and back from the river about fifty

feet. And while the river was always muddy the spring was clear as crystal and it flowed an enormous volume of water. We estimated 80,000 gallons an hour. Our wash day shows us at one of the outlets of which there were three.

Well, after getting our camp in living shape we went out to look for game, soon had some squirrels and a duck. From my diary of December 21st I see the extract, "Patching my coat and doing things around camp. King and Walter are out fishing, it's fine and warm, plenty of grasshoppers and green flies. Walter shot a big snake. Saw nine ducks, took a crack at a turkey.

On January 1st we set out some traps and got a young 'coon first night, which we ate. We soon got all our traps out. The sets were nearly all in the butts of the hollow cypresses and baited with fish and eels. We used 1's and 2's and 3 jumps. No. 1's were too small; dozens of 'coons got away. It sure was some place for 'coon and they ran every night. I had five in the traps one morning. They made a load. I ran two lines of traps, one down the river and around a big slough about four miles, then one up the river, where I used the boat.

We were fortunate in regards to a dog. The foreman of the place on which we were camped had a pack of seven, so he let us keep one at camp.

There were plenty of wild cats about, but our dog would not run them.

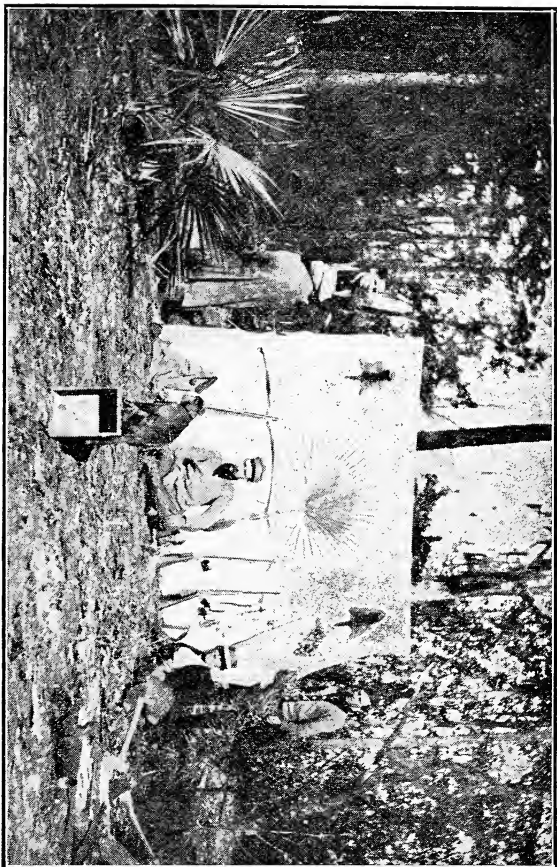
Extract from diary, January 10th says: "We have become so lazy we don't pretend to do anything much, but eat and lie about camp. Sometimes we manage to dig some worms and fish a little."

Down there, if you know how, you can get the worms, great big fellows a foot long. Walter is inspecting one.

One day while on the trap line, along a slough, I shot a black fish, almost as long as my gun which was a .32-20 Winchester.

January 18th. While trying to follow line of newly set traps, got lost in the swamp. It took me two hours to get straightened out, even with the use of the compass.

January 31. I heard a nigger give a yell, to-day, over in



Our Camp in the Heart of the Turkey Hunting Grounds

the swamp. The boys were down along Otter creek, so I whistled them in and we all piled into the boat and rushed across with the dog. The nigger had chased something out of a log, which he had dosed with shot. He said it looked like a "bar," so we put the dog on his trail and right there is when there should have been lots of spectators on hand to see the chase. First the dog leading on a hot trail, then a great big six-foot nigger with a shot gun and an axe, both held above his head, and making about 10 feet every jump, crashing through the thick palmetto and cane brake leaving a path, along and over which three white men armed with rifles hoed it down to beat the band. Within a half mile the dog treed at a big cypress that stood in a pond of water. We chopped a large hole in the side of it and built a roaring fire inside. Almost at once there was a swirl in the water and out popped a large otter.

There was a rush for rifles, the nigger jumped into the pond, which was waist deep, with the axe, but the otter glided out like grease, ran a few yards and went into a hollow log. Walter used his .32-20 on him, which proved a glancing blow on the skull and the otter ran out somewhat dazed, but full of fight. Skip attempted to settle with him, but found the job larger than he figured on. In the melee two shots from the rifles and one from the shot gun at close range failed to connect, so he was finally finished by a blow on the head with the axe. On the board he measured four feet, four inches.

The boys also chased another otter through several sloughs the same day. We saw several otter signs and had at least two get out of No. 3 jumps. I'll say they tear up things some when they get in a trap.

There was plenty of bear in the lower end of the swamp; we were in the upper end. There was a few deer; a fellow shot one out of a bunch of six while we were there. He shot it with a shot gun, No. 8 shot.

We saw plenty of wild turkeys and wild hogs. These hogs are as wild and hard to approach as deer, almost. When the natives want meat they simply put the hounds after them and when brought to bay are shot, loaded on an oxcart and taken home to dress.



Our "neighbor" gave us a shoulder from one of the pigs and it was fine meat. Speaking of our "neighbor," I went out one Sunday when they were dressed up and took a picture of his family.

We often had visitors at camp. February 10th the violets, blood-root and jessamine were in bloom. It was very warm, so we quit trapping and just fished and enjoyed ourselves until we were ready to pack, when we strung up our catch. In the picture you see Skip, who helped us enjoy the trip immensely.



# ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY TRAPPING

By Dick Wood

**I**T HAS been said by Question Box experts that St. Lawrence county is the best trapping ground in New York State for humble fur bearers of the farm pasture type. Having spent the major portion of three seasons in said county, I can, as far as muskrats and skunks are concerned with a fair sprinkling of mink, fox, weasels and 'coon, verify the above statement as a cold fact. By "cold fact" I mean simply that anything connected with this county must of necessity be cold.

Not having at my disposal here in camp sufficient aid to a limited vocabulary, such as Roget's Thesaurus or Webster's Unabridged, I must resort to a form of recipe to divulge a correct impression of this trapper's paradise. Take of Maryland marshes 25 parts, Adirondack bogs 25 parts, Mississippi canebrakes and Arkansas river swamps 25 parts, Northern Montana blizzards 25 parts and dump this topographical concoction near the North Pole and you have a pen picture of St. Lawrence county at its best. Usually I manage to get in a fair season of trapping in this weather-cursed spot after trappers elsewhere have begun to oil up their Lizzies to go trout fishing. Let me quote from my note-book.

April 8th—Went over the 'rat line to-day more from force of habit than otherwise. I left warmer weather last Christmas down the Atlantic seaboard than we have yet had in this county. For the last three days the smaller creeks have frozen over at night and hardly thawed during the day. To-day I broke ice in the marsh, creek and swamp. Everywhere I went, ice. A line produced only a couple of 'rats that should have turned out a dozen. Reason: Most of the sets frozen up and the 'rats staying in until warmer weather. A blizzard raged all day, at one time forcing me to seek the shelter of a haystack. It snowed several inches. I wonder how the folks are on the old Virginia farm!

Though I still think the Weather Man forgot St. Lawrence county and possess no admiration for the monotonous landscape (it couldn't be called scenery), when I got a few bags of circulars this winter (spring-time elsewhere) quoting four to five bucks for 'rat skins, I was found with the other kids tending a 'rat line on Sucker brook, around adjacent swamps and through to Brandy marshes.

Unquestionably St. Lawrence is a good muskrat county. There are plenty of marsh, swamp and food conducive to propagation and fur quality. The country is almost entirely open, too, which tends toward maximum good 'rat pelts. Skunks are second on the list found in fair quantity. Pard and I found that it was most profitable for us to specialize in the early winter on skunks and 'rats only. What time of the winter I was in the county we devoted considerable attention to mink, fox, and the humble weasel. Did you know it was possible to make wages on this animal alone at two dollars per skin? Well, it has been done.

During mid-winter 'rats were scarce and hard to trap. However, the extreme weather conditions did freeze out a few that fell easy victims to the energetic trapper. While some trappers were warming their shins at the crossroads store, we were trapping muskrats in midwinter, and a few times actually ran them down on land and killed them with a club or the .22 Colts. When the ice freezes through to the ground in the smaller streams and ponds, the muskrats must look for new quarters. They chew right up through the ice and then failing to find water nearby, either bed up under a snow bank, bunch of grass or start overland in search of new grounds. Obviously it is an easy matter for an experienced trapper to get 'rats when he finds these "freeze-out" signs.

This year the 'rat season opened in St. Lawrence county about March 20, unusually early, and then we had a set-back in April. When the ice goes out, muskrat trapping commences.

With a four dollar average for 'rats, the highest price in history, everybody and his son started trapping the first day after the ice cleared.

Among the swelling hoard were two trappers who claimed some priority rights, having been on the same grounds, stream

and marsh the previous fall as well as years before. Pard and I started in with an ample stock of game traps, enough it seemed for an army of trappers. We had several kinds, makes, shapes, and brands of traps, both quality-insured and mongrel stock. They filled two gunny sacks.

Sucker brook was our first objective, a sluggish stream flowing through beautiful grassy farms. It was typical high bank trapping, except in a few places where there was a little marsh. Little Sucker brook was marshy towards its head and yielded quite a fur harvest.

Having each decided on a certain territory of the creeks, we cranked up the Lizzie early one morning and started stringing out traps. It was one of those beautiful, sunny days, rare for this part of the state in late March. The weather was extremely conducive to successful trapping. Abundant signs indicated that the little muskrats had moved about lively the night before and guided us in properly placing our traps. But before we had gone far, each in a different direction, understand, our trails mingled with other trappers' tracks. I had just returned to "civilization" for the spring 'ratting after spending several months on a wilderness trap line where human tracks were seldom met with. Consequently a nicely trodden boulevard along the stream didn't look very promising in my opinion. Pard, a native of the county, assured me this was but a natural course of affairs and that I would not be considered an intruder to set my traps alongside the other fellow's and that the competition amounted to little with us. This was something out of my usual solitary habits and for the first week or two I never got closer to a competitive trapper than the opposite side of the creek. At the end of the season I was trapping "under his nose"—but wait and see.

First I followed Pard—whom I will dub Henry, "Hen" for short—over his selected territory, aiding him by carrying traps and spotting new set locations while he was setting a trap. I noticed he set under stumps and tree roots along the banks, on floating rails and in "swimming holes" (under-water burrows) almost exclusively. The latter set is considered surer than any other. In cold weather when 'rats were not coming out, sets inside high bank burrows are more reliable

than other sets. These sets are hard to locate, being done in the following manner: When the water is clear and not ruffled by wind, follow the bank of the stream looking for the mouths of under-water burrows. Usually muddy water will be issuing therefrom, in which case the burrow is a "live" one. The trap can often be set at the mouth with fair success, by wading out with hip rubber boots, but the surest method is to locate the under-ground burrow on the bank with a sharp stick or your boot. Often burrows will be accidentally located by stepping into them. Hen was an adept at locating these burrows.

As I have said before, we had plenty of competition. Rarely did we find a burrow that didn't have a trap in its mouth. This didn't stop Hen, who would promptly locate the burrow on the bank and excavate to it, usually only a few inches under the sod. The sod would be removed with extreme care in one large piece that would be replaced. Next a short stake was procured to fasten the trap in the burrow out of sight. When the trap was skillfully set in the runway, fastened, and the sod replaced, it would have taken a Sherlock Holmes of a trapper to find the set. Only by making a mental note of its location in the proximity to a stump or other mark could Hen expect to find it. Many Sucker Brook trappers, perhaps, have wondered why "swimming hole" sets didn't work so well this spring.

At washouts under trees along the banks invariably could be found abundant muskrat signs, where they had merely "nosed around" or come up to feed, bringing grass in their mouths. These locations are dependable—if you get there first. When Hen found the other fellow had beat him to the tree set, he closely examined the surroundings for burrows, either under water or close to the surface on the high bank. Invariably a den would be located near the tree and if not already guarded by a trap, we had the better set within a few feet of the competitor's trap. Furthermore, it was camouflaged in such a manner that no mediocre trapper could find it. This is trapping.

Thus I began to acquire a calloused and indifferent feeling

about the other trapper. The rule seemed to be to overlook them. This I did, but they didn't overlook me.

The second day I started with two dozen and one traps, nice quick acting devices that would make a New Jersey mink's handsprings appear like a snail's actions. Those traps, I figured, were good for 25 good sets. Twenty-five sets, I further calculated, would monopolize Little Sucker brook.

I used to wonder how trap manufacturers managed to acquire Packard cars; now I can't understand why they do not buy Rolls-Royces! There were enough traps plastered along two miles of Sucker brook's banks to start a respectable trap store with an ample stock of every brand. At every accessible location there was a cluster of traps with jaws gaping for a victim. Out West they call them gang sets, I believe. Only when a wolf trap was employed did the trapper depend on one trap securing the pelt.

By the various sizes and brands of traps, trappers' tracks on the banks, methods of setting and fastening traps, it didn't require a Nick Carter's hero to easily ascertain that I had not less than half a dozen competitors. I didn't let this pleasant news diminish my efforts; rather I expended more energy in ferreting out places overlooked by the other trappers. The competition seemed to put a zest into the game that made it more interesting—just like beating the village's champion checker player when there is a crowd around to give him the merry ha-ha.

In this keen competition trapping I learned another important thing: That three inches of extra boot top meant the difference between a few 'rats and a whole lot of 'rats. The majority of trappers being farmers' sons meant that they wore "Storm King" or other low boots and that their wading capacity was indeed limited. As it proved later, I had only two types of sets that were worth a darn, the camouflaged underground burrow set and the set beyond the wading limit of competitor trappers. This doesn't mean they wouldn't take a cold water bath for a 'rat, for these valuable rodents had to be skillfully hidden from the view at all times. If I should ever trap another section, I would by all means wear a diver's suit.

It was with considerable anticipation that I started to look at my traps the next day after setting them. Our flivver got us on the grounds shortly after daylight. Yet early as we were, I soon learned that there were trappers ahead of me. I also noted that they looked at those of my traps within sight just as they did their own. At an old stump in the water, two or three feet from the bank, I had a trap set in a "swimming hole." There was another hole close by. I had set the trap in the hole showing roily water, but now found it neatly set at the other hole. "That's queer," I thought, "that a trap should take upon itself the task of moving its position."

Not a track was to be seen on the bank near the trap, but Old Hawkeye discovered 20 feet below the set a very damp rock close to the shore. Close scrutiny revealed some blood on the grassy bank where a 'rat had evidently been skinned. He was very kind to reset the trap!

Out on a little island beyond the reach of low-booted trappers I had a drowned 'rat. In bank burrows I had a couple more. Three 'rats out of 25 traps!

It was the law of first come first served. Each serves himself, according to the law of the land and high prices. I changed my ingrained viewpoints of trappers' rights by force of necessity or law of survival of the fittest. By the light of a pale moon and Daylo we ran our trap lines and the next day had a decidedly larger catch.

However, there were days when we set out other lines or took time to extend old lines. Soon we had so many traps that it was impossible to look at all of them in the gray dawn. Invariably we found the tag end of our lines "fleeced." Every few days it snowed enough to cover the ground and during these days we could plainly see the tracks of Sneak-ems who had beat us to our traps. Four dollars per head looks pretty good to the loose fingered Sneak.

At first the Sneaks left their own traps set and tended both theirs and ours, when they beat us, as they often did. One fellow, we learned, made it a habit to run the lines, his own and any other trap found, just after dark with the aid of a fleshlight. He left the village with a shotgun and made a sham of duck or crow shooting. After while some of the

Sneak Gang learned there were trappers operating in their territory vastly superior to themselves in the trapping art. They pulled their own traps and tended ours solely, and evidently their profits were greatly increased because they saved time by not bothering with their own amateurish sets. Besides, they had time to find more of our skillfully hidden sets.

I met a farmer's son on the line one day. He was setting a No. O trap for muskrat on top of a high stone in the middle of the stream. I had lost three perfectly good \$4 'rats that day, and consequently I was delighted to interview any competitor. Yet a short conversation convinced me at the time that the lad was too green to find a trapper's set. Later Pard told me he was as innocent as a deacon, only trapping on his father's land extending between two roads, and queerly, I thought, between these two roads I had lost my three 'rats. The next day, not only my catch but traps as well were missing between these two roads. The farmer lad's traps were gone, too. That's what \$4 per skin does. Did the farmer's son glean my line? Did an outsider harvest us both? If somebody else took our traps, then I was, in the eyes of the young hayseed, the Sneakem. Such is the game in the farming sections.

Now we go by the new and accepted law—trappers' law. We run lines of various sorts. We never know just what our luck will be on the morrow. In this respect there is an increased zest to the game. We carefully set out a line of special muskrat traps on Duck Pond. The next day we find our "two for a dollar" traps gone and a "dollar a dozen" traps in their place. Ah, but the fellow was generous hearted—toward himself.

In a three-mile creek line, there are 300 and some odd traps set, a hundred to a mile, one to every 50 feet. I'll start over again. Three thousand traps, or a thousand to the mile. This is better. That's how many to the foot? You Ford your barrel of toe-pinchers down to the stream and begin to juggle them out, taking extreme care that you do not hit another fellow's trap when filing yours. The next day you look for them, not at them. Failing to find your own, by right of purchase, you look at a number of traps approximately to what

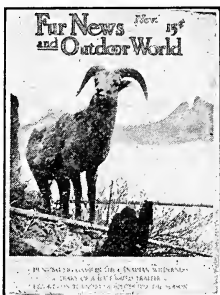


you set out. The next day you extend your energies into looking at all you can find. Soon you forget which are yours and which the other fellow's, and there you are. When you decide to move to less popular grounds, if fortunate enough to find such, you pull the number of traps you set out or all you can find, just as your conscience permits.

Down on Hay Marsh we set out a barrel and a half of traps, among several barrels of age-rusted traps belonging to other trappers, farmers, school teachers and preachers. In pulling our traps on previous grounds, we had decided, after an inventory, that a re-order to the trap city of Oneida was imperative. Thus we set bright, new traps in Hay Marsh and thereby considered we had equal rights with the other fellows even if they did own a greater portion of the traps. After a week of trapping we pulled the steel devices in disgust and permanently hung them in the woodshed to rust. The other fellows didn't catch their share of 'rats, which made it too much of a one-sided game.

I wonder what another season will bring us!





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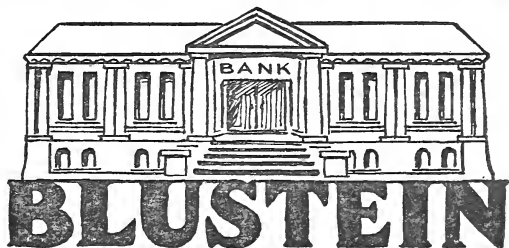
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